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ABSTRACT

Family social isolation, conflicting workplace demands, inadequate and unaffordable child care, and parent and child needs have strained family life and have led to calls for parent support programs in Scotland. This report describes Year 1 of the Positive Parenting Project, designed to support parents in combating the effects of poverty in four disadvantaged communities in Scotland. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was used to evaluate the project, including interviews with parents and key informants, focus group discussions, questionnaires, and diaries. During Year 1, the evaluation focused on analyzing needs and assessing how those needs could be addressed, with baseline reports and community profiles developed for each community. Over 300 parents were consulted to articulate their concerns and contribute to project design and planning. Parents identified a range of issues, including the need for coordinated information on available services and resources, information on child development, and effective ways of forming closer relationships with their children's schools. Findings indicated that parents felt that the support they had received increased their self-awareness and reduced feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed. Parents identified parenting courses as a negative concept and were reluctant to participate because the courses were associated with labels of bad parenting. Collaboration among agencies was the most effective way of reaching parents. Providing child care was essential to parent participation. The report notes that difficulties in reaching fathers require specific strategies targeted at this group. (Contains 50 references.) (KB)

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SCOTLAND

Supporting Parents, Supporting Parenting

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Positive Parenting Project First Year report 1998

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Supporting Parents, Supporting Parenting

First Year Report

Identifying the Support Needs of Parents and Families in Four Communities in Scotland

by Elizabeth Cutting

Save the Children Scotland Programme
Positive Parenting Project
funded by the

NATIONAL LOTTERY CHARITIES BOARD

1998

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Elizabeth Cutting

"States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children."

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 18

1 ...Introduction

In June 1996 the Scottish Programme of Save the Children Fund (SCF) was awarded a grant from the National Lottery Charities Board to fund a new initiative, the Positive Parenting Project, under the Low Income Theme of the second round of lottery grants. The grant was for a three year period and work commenced in January 1997.

The Project proposal was originally developed by SCF in response to two perceived demands; the increasing levels of poverty that children and families are experiencing in Scotland and the need for all parents to be able to access appropriate support, services and information in their roles as parents.

Parenting is an issue which concerns all of society because the way that children grow up - their attitudes, behaviour and achievements - is conditioned by their relationship with parents and other members of their family. But family life does not take place in a social vacuum and parenting cannot be considered in isolation from the many social, economic and environmental influences to which families are now exposed. Recent public discussion about families has focused overwhelmingly on the major changes which have occurred and frequently that discussion has tended to focus on the perceived inability of some parents to 'control' or adequately socialise their children.

The concept of parental responsibility is frequently raised in relation to children and anti-social behaviour, but usually in terms of the individual responsibility of the parent.

This slanted approach avoids giving any consideration to the responsibilities which the government or the wider community should have in supporting parents in their role. Today many children experience a range of dynamic family living arrangements which may include divorce, remarriage, step family formation or living with a lone parent. Frequently these situations can result in economic stress and poverty.

The social isolation of family units, the conflicting demands of the workplace, inadequate and unaffordable childcare and an array of individual needs - both children's and parents' - have placed an enormous strain on family life.

Clearly these issues are a source of concern for individual parents but their effects in terms of the social problems they can lead to, have pushed the 'family' on to the political agenda and led to calls for parents and families to be better supported.

For those families experiencing poverty, often in disadvantaged communities, the need for support is critical, both in terms of the stresses that poverty imposes and the effects this can have on parenting children. Studies have shown that programmes which assist family functioning, provide mutual support, improve parenting skills and alleviate stress, can play an important part in protecting and nurturing children.

Thus the main aim of the Positive Parenting Project is to support parents in combatting the effects of poverty in four disadvantaged communities across Scotland. Poverty in this sense refers to the elevating levels of deprivation which many families now face.

Not only do families face increasing levels of economic hardship, but frequently this impacts on their ability to access local services and resources.

In some cases poverty and deprivation can result in social exclusion as people feel disempowered and less able to participate in society or contribute to the decision making process.

The inability to seek support or participate fully in society, can contribute to feelings of isolation and stress which may have a profound affect on family functioning.

The Project will therefore undertake to empower parents by providing a range of opportunities for self-help, support, information and training. The provision of good quality childcare will enable parents to participate fully in all aspects of the Project as well as providing children with stimulating play opportunities.

Secondly, the Project will research and evaluate different ways of supporting parents and disseminate the findings to ensure that a wider range of parents and organisations can benefit from our experience.

The Project staff and resources will be sited in four different communities in the first year of the Project. The work with parents will be developed to meet previously identified unmet need and the breadth of work which this will involve, will provide practical evidence and experience of how disadvantaged parents can be supported.

The Project will therefore be able to compare and contrast the dynamics of work across a variety of geographical areas, with quite distinct circumstances and user groups.

The extensive practical knowledge which will be acquired over the three year period of the Project will be used to influence policy and practice at both local and national levels, as a way of ensuring that our work achieves lasting long - term benefits for children and families.

This report takes a closer look at parenting today and provides an account of the achievements and findings over the first year of the Project.

It also presents an outline of the work planned for the following year and the initial findings which have emerged.

"I hardly go out, I do not buy any new clothes for myself and everybody else's needs in the family has to come before mine."

2 ...Why is Parenting an issue Today?

Changing Nature of Parenting

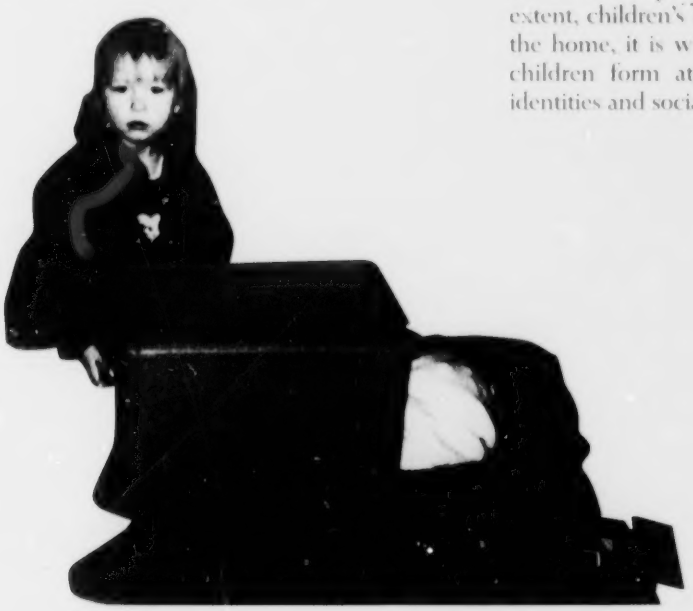
The term 'parenting' is used to encompass a range of activities and skills performed by adults in the process of child rearing and care giving. Traditionally, families relied on extended members to assist, support and advise prospective parents in their new role and children grew up in fairly homogeneous settings in which individual roles were more clearly defined.

Today however, parenting is a more ambiguous term in that it needs to take into account enormous changes in society, family patterns and social expectations.

These have all had a major impact on the process of raising children. The diversity of contemporary life has created more opportunities for change, but in doing so has led to an increase in anxiety, insecurity and instability, especially in relation to family life.

Many children today experience a range of dynamic family living arrangements which may include divorce, remarriage, reconstituted families or living with a lone parent.

The increasing diversity of possible living arrangements is likely to be the hallmark of children's lives for some time and has led to concerns being raised about how such changes can affect the quality and style of parenting children receive.



Research has shown that this factor can have a major influence on how children develop (*Richards, 1994*). In addition to these significant changes is the increasing economic stress and poverty which many families also face.

The social isolation of individual family units, the conflicting demands of the workplace, inadequate, inferior and unaffordable childcare, and an array of individual needs, both children's and parents', have pushed the 'family' into the political limelight.

It has become a focus of concern for policy makers keen to support families as a way of addressing a range of social problems associated with family breakdown and the quality of parenting. Families in the closing decade of the twentieth century find themselves the object of increasing public and political interest and discussion (*Utting,1995*).

Generally parenting continues to remain firmly within the domain of the family despite the fact that as an institution it has undergone numerous significant changes. Nearly all children are raised by their mothers and the majority will also live, during at least part of their early childhood, with their fathers.

Although children increasingly spend more time outside the home in paid care or school, most child rearing and care-taking occurs within family units. While parents oversee, at least to some extent, children's day care and education outside the home, it is within the family unit that most children form attachments and develop their identities and social selves (*Arendell, 1997*).

Demographic Changes

The structure of the family has undergone enormous changes over the years but most especially in the last three decades.~A primary demographic trend has been the shift towards smaller families.

This has mainly been due to a variety of reasons: decreasing fertility, more effective birth control, economic constraints, high marital separation and divorce rates, and a high proportion of families headed by lone women. Other significant trends include the high rates of remarriage and step-parent family formation and the changing role of women in society.

Parenting now takes place in a wide variety of situations to the extent that children living in nuclear families, defined as a family with both biological parents and full brothers and sisters present, accounts for the living arrangements of one out of two children (*Census,1991*).

The remaining children live in arrangements which include single-parent families formed by parental divorce or death, births to co-habiting parents, lone unmarried parents and adoption.

Children are also being cared for by gay and lesbian couples, grandparents and foster parents, while others are being looked after directly by the State in various residential arrangements.

Significant racial, ethnic and cultural variations are also found, which together with the range of diverse living arrangements in which parenting takes place, contribute to a situation where the definition of the term 'family' becomes increasingly difficult.

Gender Roles and Parenting - Impact on Families

One of the most profound changes over the last two decades has been in relation to the changing nature of women's roles and the affect this has had on family life. There has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of women who are combining motherhood and employment, due mainly to increasing economic pressures on the family and the reassessment of women's roles.

As more and more women enter the labour market, they face increasing levels of stress as they try to combine their responsibilities towards their children with the pressures of employment and running a home. Of the total number of mothers who are in employment, 42 per cent are lone parents (DSS,1993).

Parenting remains a role for which mothers are mainly responsible. Consistent research has shown that fathers in general do far less parenting work than mothers and that most men view their parenting involvement as discretionary (*Wiche 1993*)

While women continue to do most of the work of raising children and the bulk of household work, many men continue to have a limited involvement in either of these roles. In addition, many lone women also have the added responsibility of fulfilling the dual role of mother and income provider. In the UK, the number of families containing a lone mother has risen from 9 per cent in 1975 to 20 per cent in 1995, while the number of lone fathers had remained relatively constant at around one or two per cent. In Scotland 23 per cent of families are headed by a lone parent and again the majority are women (*ECC, 1997*).

Although it is acknowledged that some men do share their joint responsibilities with their partners, they tend to be in the minority position.

Many women experience increased levels of stress and studies have shown that this group of people experience more anxiety than any other group surveyed (*Thoits, 1996*).

When fathers do assist in these daily tasks, the stress levels of working mothers improves greatly. However, single mothers rarely have this level of help which means they face greater levels of stress than do mothers with partners. Some small studies have indicated that up to 30 per cent of mothers with children under five years suffer from depression (*DH, 1994*).

"I have to to take him everywhere with me, no one wants to look after him. I'd love to have regular childcare available."

The lack of affordable childcare services compounds the problems women face in providing care. The lack of available and affordable childcare is one of the main reasons why women in Britain are less likely to work full - time and more likely to work part - time than men (*EOC,1997*).

For some women the high costs often mean that they cannot afford to go to work and have to rely on benefits to support their children. For those mothers who do manage to work, the burdens of their dual role create barriers to their advancement in the workplace.

Many have no choice but to opt for low paid part-time work which gives them greater flexibility, or else choose to remain at lower level jobs where employers are more willing to accommodate their need for flexible hours.

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 18 (section 3) calls for States Parties to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from childcare services and facilities for which they are eligible.

The current childcare situation works against the advancement of women in the workplace and has a major impact on a mother's earning potential.

As lone parents, many women find that the skills involved in caring for children and running a home are not transferable and many face extreme levels of poverty as they assume the major burden of responsibility for their children.

In Scotland, 40 per cent of one-parent families have an income of less than £100 per week, compared with 4 per cent of families with two parents and 1 in 3 children live in households with incomes below 50 per cent of the national average (*One Parent Families in Scotland, 1995*).

Since the mid 1960s child poverty has steadily increased as a result of several factors: the increase in mother - only families; the persistence of gender inequalities, occupational segregation in the workplace, inadequate wages to women, and the declining value of public assistance.

Family composition is the most important factor in determining child poverty and female headed households are five times more likely to be poor than married - couple families (*Dickerson,1995*).

In Scotland, one in four children now live in households dependent on income support with 75 per cent of lone families now receiving this benefit (*Child and family poverty in Scotland: the facts,1996*).

Children from households experiencing poverty are disadvantaged in terms of education, achievement, physical and mental well - being and susceptibility to accidents. 'It is poverty not public assistance per se that is linked to poor outcomes for children' (*Ariendell, 1997; p18*).

Poverty can mean that many families are unable to provide sufficient food, clothing, heating or adequate housing. It can also greatly restrict access to services or social activities that others consider normal and effectively result in social exclusion or isolation. Children who are brought up in poverty are more likely to suffer illness and less likely to do well at school.

Disadvantages of this nature tend to have a long term impact in adulthood (*Child and family poverty in Scotland: the facts, 1996*). Scottish children face one of the highest risks of growing up in poverty in the European Union, with those under five facing the greatest risks (*McCormick & Leicester, 1998*).

Political and Legal Developments

Parenting has been on the political agenda in this country for some time. Since 1970 it has appeared at various points in time but since the early 1990s, in response to increasing concerns about youth crime, child care, school exclusion and teenage pregnancies; parenting issues have been at the centre of much official thinking (*Smith, 1996*).

In 1992 the Government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and under the terms of the Convention committed itself to constructing the frameworks and structures through which children's rights could be effectively implemented.

The UNCRC highlighted the model of partnership between parents and the State in ensuring that the family receives the protection and assistance it needs to fully assume its responsibilities within the community, in caring for and raising children.

Article 18 sets out the principle that while both parents have the responsibility for bringing up their children, the State is equally obliged to support them in that task.

> *"States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children".*

Individual countries must therefore take account of this basic principle within their own legislative frameworks and structures in ensuring that the best interests of the child are secured. Parental rights should be developed to promote the welfare of children, not the benefit of parents.

The Children Act 1989, part of which applied to Scotland, introduced the concept of parental responsibility but did not go on to develop its definition. However, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 did take this further by setting out a list of basic obligations for parents and the required rights to fulfil those obligations.

This Act does much to clarify parental responsibilities in respect of children and is underpinned by the principle that any action in respect of a child must be taken in that child's best interests.

What is not addressed is the State's role or responsibility in providing support to help parents meet these obligations.

In October 1996 the Labour Party published a discussion paper *'Tackling the Causes of Crime'* which examined the perceived links between poor parenting and negative outcomes for children.

This was quickly followed by another discussion paper on the importance of parenting for children and the need to support parents in their role (*Parenting, Nov.1996*).

In opposition the Labour Party committed itself to identifying and developing the most effective ways of supporting parents and safeguarding the long term interests of children. So far the emphasis of the new government and the media appears to be focused on enforcing parental responsibilities as obligations, rather than examining ways of supporting parents and carers in meeting those responsibilities. Under the Crime and Disorder Bill, which is likely to come into force later this year, parents of young offenders up to age 17 may be forced by the courts to attend parenting skills programmes in an attempt to prevent more serious problems developing.

As part of the Government's interest in developing a national policy on supporting parenting, the Home Office convened a ministerial seminar in London in November 1997.

This event focused on how to promote successful parenting and looked at practical ways to support parents and prevent parenting failure. A report was produced following this event, entitled *'Promoting Successful Parenting'*. The Scottish Office is currently considering a report from the cabinet committee on the family before making any decision about how it intends to address these issues.

Developing Support for Parents

Clearly the time is right for parental support to be developed to match the diverse needs which parents have, given the extent of the changes which parenthood and parenting has undergone in the last thirty years.

The parenting role attracts a great deal of media attention, much of it negative and condemnatory, with very little recognition given to the range of difficulties which parents today face. That parents need some form of support is not in dispute; what is not clear is what form that support should ideally take and under what circumstances. Should it be targeted at certain parents or should all parents have access to some degree of support?

The Positive Parenting Project aims to try and answer some of these questions and provide guidelines on the delivery of support to a range of parents in a range of different circumstances by drawing on the extensive experience which Save the Children Fund has acquired in working with families.

3 . . . Methodology

Introduction

The Project has been designed to ensure that the work with parents takes place in a broad range of environments, both urban and rural, using a variety of approaches.

This will provide a wide cross section of information, drawn from a small, self-selecting but representative number of families living in disadvantaged communities throughout Scotland.

In anticipation of the large and varied amount of information which the Project was likely to generate and in recognition of the importance attached to monitoring and evaluating, a full time project co-ordinator's post was considered to be of fundamental importance.

This role would allow for the work to be co-ordinated across the Project and provide an ongoing assessment of the various methods by which the work was meeting both its general and specific objectives. It was also designed to ensure that the ongoing recording of work with parents in each community allowed for elements of good practice to be monitored, recorded and disseminated in an appropriate manner.

There are currently a large number of parenting programme courses taking place throughout the UK which utilise a range of approaches in supporting parents.

While many of these programmes have been evaluated very favourably in terms of their positive impact for parents and children, other studies have been critical of their success in terms of reaching very limited numbers of people and failing to reach parents from lower socio-economic groups (*Smith & Pugh, 1996*).

This particular study has shown that while these programmes aim to address the needs of a wide range of parents, the indications are that they tend to attract mainly white middle-class women. Further difficulties also arise in evaluating these programmes due to the dangers of drawing generalisations from what are often very specific studies whose outcomes are related to the particular programmes being evaluated.

In acknowledging the methodological difficulties in evaluating parent support in terms of cause and effect, the Project will draw on a range of methods to provide an evaluation which addresses some of the shortcomings that have been identified in previous studies.

Freed from the limitations of having to test or prove a hypothesis, the work with parents aims to identify what it is exactly that parents want in terms of support and information, and how they would like that support delivered.

The evaluation aims to

- assess the impact of our work with parents
- identify the most successful methods of working with parents
- monitor impact on an ongoing basis
- compare work across the Project in terms of impact and sustainability
- inform ongoing work
- disseminate findings

The approach to the evaluation could therefore be described as illustrative rather than correlative, and uses an inductive method of analysis which draws on the ongoing experiences and findings of those working with parents across the Project.

Evaluation Framework

At the outset it was decided that in order to acquire the necessary information a number of techniques, both quantitative and qualitative, would be used in the ongoing process of consultation and working with parents and organisations.

It was also acknowledged that parents should not be subjected to any research methods which were felt to be intrusive, complex or verbose and that confidentiality would be assured.

The evaluation was therefore designed around a set of principles which have provided a framework for the work and ongoing data collection and analysis. These principles have been identified by a number of studies as important features which should be included in an evaluation of this nature (*Smith & Pugh, 1996*), and include the following:

- clearly defined concepts behind the work
- use of external evaluation
- collection of baseline information about the community in which the work is taking place
- indication of the extent to which support work responds to the diverse needs of parents
- profile of parents in contact with the Project
- feedback from parents regarding support both positive and negative
- the importance of *process* as well as *outcome*
- comparison of work across the Project
- impact on children

The systematic collection of information regarding these aspects of the Project will provide the data necessary to enable valid and reliable conclusions to be reached.

Theoretical Approach

The work is based on a needs led and preventive model of working with parents which has been identified by a number of sources as a method of working which is more likely to produce relevant and appropriate information (*Smith& Pugh,1996*). This approach ensures that by undertaking a needs assessment within each community, any work undertaken with parents is well informed, clearly defined and better placed to utilise resources most effectively within the time constraints of the Project.

Preventive work with families has been identified by numerous sources as the most effective means of avoiding severe long term problems. This has led to calls for resources to be directed in this way towards families rather than remedial family support services (*Utting,1995; Pugh,1994; Audit Commission, 1994*).

External Ongoing Evaluation

Smith & Pugh's (1996) survey of parenting programmes pointed to the lack of objectivity inherent in evaluations which are often undertaken by those directly involved in the work.

In addition, evaluation is frequently retrospective, provides limited information and usually relates to a specific type of intervention. However, many of the decisions made in relation to the level and extent of evaluation are usually determined by the availability of resources.

To address these issues, the Project has built in additional resources to ensure that evaluation is an integral and ongoing part of the work. A Co-ordinator post, dedicated to researching and evaluating the Project, will be responsible for ensuring that the work is monitored and evaluated systematically.

This allows for a greater degree of objectivity than would normally be possible and will help to ensure that the work programme is recorded, analysed and disseminated appropriately.

The ongoing procedure of evaluation will also provide for more effective project management, as the continuous information gathering process allows results to be fed back into the work programme within a much shorter time period.

This will facilitate a more informed planning process, based on up to date relevant information and help to ensure that resources are utilised effectively. This we believe will help to address many of the problems of retrospective evaluations and reviews, which often provide insufficient information after the work has been completed.

Methods Used

The main data gathering techniques being used include interviews (with parents), key informant interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires, record keeping/diaries, project workers group meetings, use of existing community reports and community profiles, compiling baseline reports and the use of evaluation forms.

The Project Co-ordinator also regularly visits project sites to discuss progress with group workers, identify new developments, share information, assist with research, meet parents and others employed on the Project and observe first-hand the work with parents.

In addition, a number of Project workers, including the Co-ordinator, frequently attended relevant conferences and seminars to keep abreast of current developments in policy and practice and to network with other agencies working in the same area.

Interviews

Face to face and group interview were conducted with parents and key informants in local organisations as part of the needs assessment. These interviews were frequently recorded, transcribed and analysed and this technique elicited most of the information required to produce needs assessment reports.

Each interviewee was asked a similar set of questions which were designed to stimulate ideas and opinions and centred on the interviewee's personal knowledge and experience of local services and how these met individual needs.

On a more informal basis, project workers visited existing local groups to chat to parents about support needs in their community. This allowed issues to be raised which could then be addressed in more structured ways.

Questionnaires

In Angus, a questionnaire was designed for parents to complete at a locally staged Information Day which brought service providers together to promote their work in the community *(see section on Angus, Chapter 5)*.

In Muirhouse, parents were involved in designing and distributing a questionnaire in their local school as part of a needs assessment exercise *(see section on Muirhouse, Chapter 6)*. Where possible, methods were used which ensured that parents were able to participate in the evaluation process as much as possible.

Evaluation Forms

Evaluation forms have been designed as part of an ongoing exercise to evaluate how parents view the support measures they participate in and to record social and demographic details about these parents and their families.

They are also used to record ongoing issues which arise and how these are addressed in our work. A set of forms have been developed which parents complete initially and project workers complete on a regular basis. Feedback is encouraged from all those involved, as the aim is to continually revise the design of these forms and to eventually produce a set of evaluation forms which are user friendly.

Record Keeping - Diaries

Each Project worker was asked to keep a weekly diary which provides an account of the contacts and activities taking place with both parents and other local organisations in each community.

This information is regularly returned to the Co-ordinator where it is used to update the work information files, monitor any new developments and provide a general aid to communication.

Existing Community Reports

Where reports existed, these were consulted in the planning of work and provided a valuable source of background information which was used extensively in the production of baseline reports for each community.

The First Year

During the first year of the Project the evaluation focused on two main areas: analysing needs and assessing how those needs could be addressed. As discussed earlier, the work with parents follows a needs led approach in which parents themselves identify the issues in terms of their support needs and the best ways of then addressing those needs.

The first task in this process was to research and produce a baseline report for each part of the project. This was essentially a community profile or audit of needs which provided a comprehensive account of the community environment and focused on the following areas:

- the community in which the Project is based
- the resources within the community which can be utilised
- the people and organisations within the community
- the problems which the community faces

These reports provided a solid foundation from which aims and objectives for each element of the project were then produced. This end of year evaluation focuses on the extent and manner in which each of these aims and objectives have been addressed and how the findings so far will inform and direct the work with parents for the following year.

4 ...Save the Children's experience of working with parents and families in Scotland

Save the Children Fund aims to make a reality of children's rights through working closely with local communities in Scotland, the UK and over 50 other countries throughout the world. In Scotland, SCF has worked in partnership with disadvantaged communities and other organisations over a period of twenty years, to develop innovative practice and policy models through its community based projects and national advocacy work.

This is linked to similar work elsewhere in the UK and internationally with families.Through this work and the contacts that have been developed with families in disadvantaged communities, we are aware of the increasing levels of poverty that children and families are experiencing and the need for all parents to be able to access appropriate support, services and information in their roles as parents.

Our experience of these communities has demonstrated that the effects of poverty on families can lead to increased levels of stress and isolation, reduce access to information and services and severely limit opportunities in training, education and employment. For these families, poverty means diminished life chances and in some cases having to go without essentials such as sufficient food, adequate housing, heating and clothing. Parents in these circumstances need support to cope with the pressure points that come from living with and finding ways out of poverty.

The link between poverty, ill health and premature death is now well established and there is considerable evidence to show that the problems associated with debt and living on low incomes can have a deleterious impact on psychological health (*Child and family poverty in Scotland: the facts, 1996*).While families have become increasingly likely over the least fifteen years to find themselves in poverty, the risk is not equally shared. There are now strong links between discrimination and poverty and particular groups of individuals within families are especially vulnerable, such as women, lone parents, disabled people, minority ethnic groups and young people. The Project aims to be responsive to the needs of these groups of individuals as parents.

SCF's experience of working with families over a number of years has highlighted the importance of offering a range of support services to families on an open access basis. Providing services and facilities which meet a variety of needs and making these flexible and responsive, is the most effective way of ensuring that families benefit most. By making access open to all families in the area and avoiding a problem - focused approach, support is more likely to be welcomed positively and less likely to be viewed as stigmatising. The provision of quality childcare is an important element in supporting parents and allowing them to participate fully without having to worry about their children. Childcare provides good quality play and preschool experience for children, while allowing parents to work, study or take part in other activities. This aspect of the Parenting Project underpins our commitment to ensuring that we make a positive impact on children's lives while supporting parents.

The work with parents is designed to support families and help to prevent breakdown or crisis. By working with families, recognising their needs, working in partnership with other agencies and making users feel part of the developing infrastructure of support, parents are more likely to have their needs met and receive the support they require.

The Project will adopt this approach in working with families as a way of strengthening the ability of individuals, families and communities,to cope informally with problems as they arise and thus help to avoid or prevent more serious problems. SCF hopes to strengthen its knowledge base in relation to supporting parents and in line with the newly developing Scottish Programme strategy, will actively promote the need to support parents and advocate on their behalf.

The Positive Parenting Project is at present based in four centres in Scotland: Niddrie and Muirhouse in Edinburgh and Rosemount in the Royston area of Glasgow. In rural Angus the Project is based in Montrose but works across the rural community of Angus. This is a new development for Save the Children in partnership with Angus Council.

We are hoping to develop a further programme of work in an additional community during 1998/9. Each element of the Project will have a slightly different focus in that the target group of parents will vary slightly, but each will work to the same principles of identifying needs and working closely with parents as partners, in defining the type of support to offer. The following chapters review the work and developments which have taken place with parents in each of the four locations over the course of the first year of the Project.

5

. . . Children and families in Rural Angus

The following chapters examine each element of the Project and provide an account of developments and findings during the first year. Potential work for the remainder of the Project is also identified and the main findings are summarised in the final chapter.

Background

The Children and Families in Rural Angus Project is a partnership between Save The Children (Scotland) and Angus Council which began in February 1997.

It was formed to develop innovative approaches to supporting children and families in rural Angus by building on the joint resources of both agencies and working collaboratively with other local voluntary and statutory organisations.

The existence of a collaborative consultation structure as represented by the Under 8s Fora, provided the foundation for discussions between Save The Children and Angus Council. Both agencies identified the potential for the development of rural childcare on a partnership basis which led to the current partnership arrangement and the decision to support a peripatetic child and family resource worker who would address the needs of children and families in Angus.

The target areas identified for the partnership included extensive outreach and development work in consultation with parents and other agencies, in order to identify unmet local need and to develop and establish programmes and new initiatives which would support parents and families in a variety of rural settings.

The work was intended to take a holistic view of the area in Angus and to adopt a community development approach in developing and supporting appropriate initiatives.

Area profile

Angus is a rural area with approximately 86 per cent of the land under agricultural use. It has a population of 111,120 (Census 1991) of which approximately 20 per cent are under the age of 16. 32.8 per cent of the total population reside out with the seven main settlements or burgh towns of Arbroath, Carnoustie, Monifieth, Brechin, Forfar, Kirriemuir and Montrose.

Following the restructuring of local authorities, which came into effect on 1st April 1996, the new boundary arrangements increased in the number of children under eight years in Angus by 13.8 per cent. This is expected to have major implications for childcare resources throughout the district and confirms the need for additional, locally accessible and affordable childcare facilities in the area..

Angus contains a relatively high proportion of privately rented housing (27.5% compared to 10.0% for Scotland) and a high proportion of this tenure is accounted for by housing rented from an employer, or 'tied' housing (*Shucksmith,1994*).

One of the main issues revolves around the shortage of rented housing for low- income households, especially in the public sector, as there is an over-emphasis on owner occupation in the area. Young families and single person households experience the most restrictions on housing, due to lack of choice.

In rural Angus the economy is based primarily on agriculture despite declining opportunities within this sector.

As with other rural areas Angus has seen a reduction in employment opportunities for its indigenous population, due mainly to the advent of new technology in farming and forestry.

This reduction in the need for labour has seen a large number of tied or low cost housing stock being freed up and sold on the open market, resulting in many of the indigenous workers out-migrating to find work and housing in the towns and cities. These structural changes have caused a breakdown in the traditional family and neighbourhood networks that generally operate in rural areas resulting in a number of families experiencing the effects of social and situational isolation and disadvantage.

Generally there is limited employment prospects and those that do exist tend to be low-paid and insecure. For young people, there is a lack of employment options and youth unemployment is a significant factor in the increase in crime and vandalism in Angus.

In particular, women have limited job opportunities given that the majority of local jobs tended to be in the male dominated agricultural sector.

In addition, the employment aspirations of women are further curtailed by the generally inadequate level of childcare provision in the area.

Of the total population in Angus, 32.8 per cent reside outwith the seven main settlements or burgh towns. With the exception of Kirriemuir all of these areas are linked by an efficient road network which also serves a variety of small villages and hamlets. While many of the larger areas are served by an efficient public transport system, the smaller communities in the area receive a much reduced service which makes it difficult to engage in activities in the main settlements.

The area is well served by both statutory and voluntary organisations, however access to these services is difficult for those in more remote areas due to either a lack of private transport or difficulties in accessing public transport.

The geographical spread of Angus, particularly in the west, also creates difficulties for those who have responsibility for service delivery in the area, given the lengthy amounts of time that can be spent travelling to and from appointments.

Poverty Levels

Angus, in common with many rural areas, experiences a level of poverty which has a major impact on the daily lives of children and families. *Shucksmith et al 1994* concluded that poverty was not just about income but about the purchasing power that a given income provides.

Their research showed that poverty was widespread in rural Scotland and estimated that 65% of heads of households had incomes below the Low Pay Unit Poverty Threshold of £200 per week, compared to 55% for Britain as a whole.

These figures ranged from 46% in Angus to 85% in Harris; showing that low pay is a major issue for rural economies. For many people living in these rural areas the income they receive is frequently intermittent, due to the extensive and somewhat compulsory reliance on seasonal agricultural work.

While some families are able to supplement their income with state benefits, the uptake for this additional source of finance was found to be lower than would have been expected given the levels of low income. Confusion about entitlement and the benefits that are available, coupled with difficulties in accessing information and the stigma associated with claiming are all thought to be responsible for this low uptake.

The additional costs associated with living in a rural environment in terms of transport, heating and fuel and the knock on affect these have for prices generally, means that those on a low income have less spending power.

The combination of low income with high living costs combines to restrict choice and opportunity in many areas of life.

Travel is restricted and choice of food, goods and access to leisure and entertainment is also limited. In addition, access to training and higher education may also be precluded, with the lack of child care further complicating the issues for parents who may wish to avail themselves of these opportunities.

"You feel that you are on your own and banging your head against a brick wall... It would be good to speak to other parents who are going through the same thing."

Childcare and Family Support

Angus has one Child and Family Centre sited in Arbroath, which provides a range of support resources for families. While the majority of registered childminders, nurseries and Out of School Clubs tend to be concentrated on the main settlements, there is a well established network of voluntary pre-school organisations in the area along with five support groups for Children with Special Needs.

Angus Council is committed to providing a part time nursery place for all four year olds in the area, and expects to reach this target in the latter part of 1997. However, the majority of these places are part-time places which may not fulfill everyone's needs. For those parents wishing to take up employment or training opportunities, part-time nursery places generally do not allow parents sufficient flexibility.

Given the added problems in a rural environment of travelling and the associated costs, many parents find that in order to arrange child care they frequently have to make private alternative arrangements.

Main Areas of Concern

A number of reports have highlighted the main concerns for people living in rural areas as: poverty, lack of affordable housing, access to services, limited employment opportunities and for women the lack of jobs, transport and child-care provision. Studies conducted by the former Tayside Regional Council Education and Social Work Departments and locally based research undertaken by the Staff of Angus Council Social Work Department Rural Outreach Team, confirmed these findings and the direction the partnership would take in supporting children and families in the area.

Thus in view of the known issues for parents in Angus and rural areas generally, the Positive Parenting Project formulated a set of aims which the work would seek to address. These aims were as follows:

- To identify issues for children and families in rural Angus
- To enable members of the community to access services locally
- To highlight parenting issues in rural Angus
- To assist parents to establish support systems which will help them to address the common issues and concerns.

From these aims more specific objectives were set for the first year of the Project:

- Contact key informants in the area to promote the Project and establish current issues of concern for parents
- Make contact with a broad range of parents in Angus and conduct a needs assessment using interview and focus group techniques
- Produce a needs assessment report to identify the issues and inform the work plan
- Develop a programme with and for parents, to address identified needs

Consulting with Parents

While it was recognised that there was a need for general support for families, the initial priority was to establish what exactly those issues were and how they could be addressed by the Project.

This was also necessary to ensure that the work followed a 'needs led' approach in line with the overall Project's principles. The Project Advisory Group provided the essential contacts with a broad range of professionals working in the area, as well as those involved with various community activities, who were all well placed to comment on the issues.

Parents were contacted by the Project worker through social work family support groups and parent and toddler groups were the only resources offering support to parents in the area. At the out-set of the Project there were no self - help support groups for parents operating in rural Angus.

Assessing Needs

To produce a needs assessment report a number of techniques were utilised. As a first step in establishing the issues, face to face interviews were conducted with key people in the area who have considerable contact with families in the course of their work. Each person was asked to present their views and how these could be addressed by the Project. The main points arising from these discussions were recorded and compiled.

Parents were then contacted via local village hall committees, local action groups and various parent and toddler groups and asked in focus group sessions about the issues from their perspective. These sessions allowed parents a chance to articulate their views about the issues that affected them and to identify how their needs could be met. The main points arising from these discussions were also recorded and compiled.

In addition, Information Days were held in Kirriemuir and Muirhead which involved a number of local agencies working with the Parenting Project coming together to promote the services they offered. These two areas were chosen because they were geographically quite remote and offered little in the way of support for the large number of young families living there.

This event provided some additional direct contact with parents who were also asked to complete a short questionnaire about the issues for them in the area and how they felt these could be addressed. This provided further information from parents, some of whom openly welcomed the opportunity to become involved in a self-help group in the future.

While the Information Days provided an opportunity for local agencies to get together and raise the profile of the services they provided locally, they were not very successful in terms of reaching a large volume of people. Participants were positive about the opportunity for people to network and feel part of a wider initiative but given the level of response on both occasions it was decided not to proceed with two other planned events.

Networking with local health workers,community education personnel and social workers was found to be a much more productive way of promoting the work of the Parenting Project and reaching parents.

Findings

A Needs Assessment Report, based on the information which had been gathered from parents and those working in the area, was produced in July 1997. This identified the main issues for families in rural Angus and provided a framework from which these could then be addressed.

For those representing a wide range of organisations in the area there was a clear emphasis on the value and importance of developing collaborative working practices as a way of addressing common issues and concerns. In view of the current climate of limited time and resources this method of working offered considerable advantages.

For parents, the most prominent gap in support provision related to the needs of parents of middle years and adolescent children. The majority of respondents felt that support systems similar to those available to parents of pre-school children should be established. Many parents felt isolated from their peer group and missed the opportunity to share common concerns regarding the progress of their children.

While there was general agreement from parents on the need to provide some form of parent support in the area, some specific issues within this were identified. Social isolation was an issue for many parents as their children moved on to the formal education system from nursery or toddler groups. Parents at this stage often felt 'redundant' and 'lost' as the network established via Parent and Toddler Groups, Playgroups and Health Visitors is no longer available.

Parents felt that setting up Mothers or Parents Groups which were social or activity based, would enable them to meet other adults with similar interests and concerns and allow them to participate more fully in their community.

For parents of early years children, access to childcare was identified as an important issue. Many parents tend to rely on an informal network of extended family members or friends, but the lack of formal and available childcare seriously affected their ability to return to work, training or learning. Parents would like to have access to locally based training or learning centres, with creche provision available, as a way of addressing this issue.

"Being a parent is not a game, it is not about pushing a pram and holding dollies."

Some parents expressed a need for more information regarding services locally and felt that mobile or static sites, for example mobile libraries, village stores, halls or Post Offices could be used to enable families to access relevant services and information locally.

The lack of information about local services generally was also highlighted at the Information Days and the need for some form of information provision about local services was raised by parents. In addition, some parents felt that the opportunity to meet and discuss concerns on a 'drop in' basis would also be welcomed. Transport issues were raised in terms of the high costs involved in maintaining a private car and the often inadequate public transport system available in some remote areas.

Parents generally felt that they had not been adequately prepared for the responsibilities and tasks involved with becoming a parent. Preparation for parenthood is a subject which they felt should be taught in Secondary Schools as a way of helping young people make informed choices regarding sexual activity and parenthood. Access to sexual health and contraception information was also identified as an issue by Health Visitors.

Addressing Local Needs

The Needs Assessment Report was submitted to both the Project Advisory Group and Health Visitors and a number of areas were identified as opportunities which offered the potential for future development by the Project.

Kirriemuir Parents' Group

The close contact with local workers which the partnership approach to the work provided, led to the Project worker being introduced to a group of young parents in Kirriemuir and eventually setting up the first parent's group in the area.

The local Health Visitor arranged the meeting which identified the need for a parent's group in the area. These parents emphasised the importance of forming a group which had a strong social focus to it, as many felt isolated and needed the support which such a group could potentially offer. The opportunity to have time on their own while their children were taken care of in a play group was also highlighted.

The Project worker together with the Health Visitor, identified and negotiated the free use of facilities in the Kirriemuir Leisure Centre. Community Education agreed to organise creche workers and the Toy Library and Rural Outreach Team provided toys for the creche.

In addition, the Community Education minibus was made available for those parents who required transport. Once these facilities were confirmed and available, the Health Visitor approached the parents once again and invited them along to discuss the group and what they would like to do.

The first meeting was well attended with eventually nine mothers in all joining. These sessions are facilitated by the Project worker and a Child and Family Centre worker who has been seconded to the Social Work Department's Rural Outreach Team. The group is jointly managed by the Project staff and local Health Visitors.

The parents who attended ranged in age from 17 to 27 years; with the children ranging in age from four weeks to eight years. All of the parents used the creche facilities provided and welcomed the opportunity this gave them to make new friends and look at their own needs. They meet on Friday mornings between 9.30 and 11.00 am in the local sports centre.

The group identified the type of activities they were interested in and these provided a framework for the sessions. Physical health, exercise, healthy eating, first aid, art work, swimming and a trip to Dundee covered the range of sessions from October to December 1997.

At the next group of sessions parents want to look at child behaviour and development, mental health issues, sleep disorders, dental hygiene, speech therapy and communicating with children. The Project worker involved will organise and facilitate these sessions with locally based people from relevant agencies and organisations coming in to speak to parents on each of the topics.

This work in Kirriemuir is ongoing and will be evaluated fully at a later date. Early indications are that this facility is meeting identified local needs and the group appears committed to continuing and expanding.

Parents in Airlie

Airlie is another remote area of Angus in which a number of families feel particularly isolated, with very little available locally in the way of community facilities. A parent who had attended one of the Information Days was anxious to set up a group locally for parents and requested that the Project worker contact her. Through this parent, a number of other parents in the area got together to discuss what they could do to address these issues.

Essentially the area lacked a community facility which could be used by a range of groups in the area. The Play Group and Toddler's Group used a room in the local school, which was also used for a number of other groups.

The lack of a dedicated facility to allow groups to develop was considered to be a priority which this group of parents wanted to address. In addition, many parents have to walk a long distance to take children to school or nursery each day.

In inclement weather there is nowhere to wait until it is time to collect children again. Parents wanted a room which they could use in these circumstances but which could also be used by other groups.

The old school house in the grounds of the school, which has remained unused for some time, was identified as a possible solution. The Head Teacher was anxious to develop this facility and together with the parents, arranged to meet the Project worker to discuss what could be done to take the work forward. This meeting led to a proposal being submitted to the Director of Education in Angus outlining the need for such a resource and requesting formal approval for the use of the facility.

The local authority has granted approval for the proposal, providing the group is successful in securing funding for necessary repairs to the building. The group is currently in the process of drawing up a constitution which will allow it to apply for charitable status.

Once this has been obtained they will then be in a position to apply to a range of funding sources.

While the parents are committed to getting the group up and running and securing a much needed community resource, the Project worker, in collaboration with the Community Education worker, is providing support during the initial stages and the funding process.

In the meantime the parents are using the school facilities as a temporary measure, but expect to progress the development of the old school house over the coming months.

Accessing Information Locally

Parents identified the lack of information available about locally based services and a number of suggestions were put forward. The concept of a directory appeared to be the most popular method of making information available and the Project worker decided to take this idea forward.

A Community Education student has been appointed to undertake the data collection and database design between January and March 1998. This would enable the information to be updated regularly and an information leaflet produced which could then be made available to parents and families locally. This work is in line with one of key aims of Children and Families in Rural Angus, which is to enable members of the community to access services locally.

"I so much wanted children, but I did not know that having children meant crying babies, sleepless nights and the loss of my identity."

Preventive Work in Secondary Schools

The need to address parenting issues at a much earlier stage in terms of making young people more aware of the tasks and responsibilities that come with being a parent, were identified in the needs assessment. As it is difficult to reach young people out with school hours in the remote areas, school is the only place where they can be reached en masse.

The Senior Education Officer, Health Visitors and a number of Head Teachers in Montrose and Kirriemuir are keen to develop this resource in schools in collaboration with the Positive Parenting Project. In the early part of 1998, it is hoped to pilot a parenting awareness initiative in two schools. This course for young people will explore parenting issues and raise awareness.

It is intended to involve young people in the process and to provide feedback from them to inform developments of this service more extensively. The development of this work is ongoing.

Summary

The Parenting Project in Angus has been a catalyst in drawing local agencies together to address local needs and issues for families. It has allowed existing resources to be consolidated more effectively as an atmosphere of co-operation has developed. The existence of the Advisory Group has been instrumental in fostering this situation and has encouraged and strengthened this partnership approach to the work.

While the Information Days were not very successful in terms of attracting large numbers of parents, they did help to consolidate the collaborative approach to the work by bringing people together as a group, rather than as individual agencies or organisations working in isolation.

The work is thus perceived in terms of a group of dedicated locally based people working together to address local needs and has helped to foster a sense of 'group ownership'. The working ethos that has now been established is seen as a positive endorsement of the partnership approach and welcomed by all those involved.

Parents in contact with the project have welcomed the opportunity to articulate their needs and the issues for families in this rural community. They have responded positively to setting their own agenda and addressing the issues of isolation, lack of facilities and access to leisure opportunities.

By focusing on the support needs of parents as individuals, the Project has allowed people the time and space for other issues to emerge. Child development, child behaviour and a range of health issues such as first aid, illness, healthy eating and mental health have all gradually emerged as the parents' own needs were gradually being addressed. The provision of quality play workers allowed parents to have time to themselves, meet new people, try out new activities and organise trips without having to arrange child care.

Future Work

The Project has identified a number of ongoing areas to develop over the next year.

- continue with the Kirriemuir Parents' Group
- develop another parent group in Montrose
- support the development of the Airlie Group
- develop a parenting awareness course for schools
- support the production of an information leaflet for parents detailing local services and resources
- continue to identify issues for parents in Angus
- respond to requests for support for parents and families
- continue to promote and extend the Parenting Project throughout Angus

"You should think of a long term solution, schools should teach children how to cope as parents."

6 ...Muirhouse Under 12's and Parents Project - Edinburgh

Background

Muirhouse is part of the area in the north of Edinburgh known as Greater Pilton. It is an area which has for some time experienced a range of social and economic problems that have had major implications for families living there. SCF established a centre in Muirhouse in 1986 in response to the area being designated an area of chronic social and economic development.

Over the past ten years the Muirhouse Under 12s and Parents Project has built an excellent reputation for good practice and has developed a model of working which meets the needs of parents and children. It has developed expertise in work with a specific focus, such as health, poverty, social isolation and child development.

It provides a safe, pleasant and challenging environment for children, an opportunity for parents to work constructively with children and access to training and support. The work in Muirhouse is a key element in the overall provision for families in the area who attend on a voluntary basis.

Workers work in partnership with parents, children and other organisations. It is in this centre that the Positive Parenting Project is based.

Areas of Concern

The area of Greater Pilton suffers from high levels of unemployment, extensive dependency on benefits, poor health - both mental and physical, a high proportion of single parent households and a high proportion of households with three or more children. Lack of jobs, lack of skills and lack of childcare are significant factors which can create barriers to taking up employment.

A health needs assessment conducted in the area (*Boyce,1996*), highlighted the levels of stress found in relation to the social and economic conditions which people in this area experience.

Poverty, deprivation, environmental conditions, isolation, access to health care and information, poor diet and the lack of affordable food, all featured highly. The report also pointed to the need for family support services to be developed and in particular called for support for parents to be developed in conjunction with other local agencies or organisations.

While the area has a large number of organisations and projects working to support families, their focus tends to be mainly on families with pre-school children. Also, as many do not provide childcare for those who attend, these resources tend to be under - used. A number of primary schools have Parents' Rooms which are intended to provide a contact point for parents.

However, these rooms are dependent on the availability of workers to support and encourage parents to attend. This gap in provision was highlighted by a number of local parents and key professionals, as an area which needed to be addressed.

The social and economic profile of Muirhouse and the already recognised need to improve support to families experiencing poverty in the area, led to the decision to initiate a Parenting Project based at the Muirhouse Under Twelves and Parents Centre. Funding allowed for one full time Development Worker who would provide additional support to parents in the area. The focus of the work in the initial stages was to:

- Research and identify the support needs of parents of primary school age children in Muirhouse.
- Develop a self help befriending network for parents with parents trained as volunteer befrienders
- Work with local education, training and employment organisations to identify issues of concern to parents seeking to enter these fields.
- Promote children's rights and associated parents' rights.

"The support I get is listening to other people and realising that you are not the only person in that situation."

In addition a Playworker was also employed to provide quality childcare when required. Both workers are based at the Muirhouse Under Twelves and Parents Centre which provides any necessary contacts and support, as well as the use of the extensive facilities there. Adopting a mainly community development approach, the work concentrates on identifying the most appropriate ways in which to support parents in Muirhouse.

From the above aims more specific objectives were developed to cover the first year of the Project:

- contact and interview key personnel in all local organisations working with parents and families in Greater Pilton to establish relevant support needs and gaps in provision
- contact and interview parents with primary school age children in Greater Pilton to explore their support needs and identify how these could be addressed
- contact local Primary Schools to establish the most appropriate way to support parents

Identifying Parents' Needs - Making contact with parents and the wider community

Initially the project worker contacted a range of agencies and organisations working with parents and families in the area to establish the level of support currently being offered to parents and to identify any gaps in provision. Key personnel were interviewed from a cross section of these resources which provided a great deal of information as well as helping to establish a network of contacts in the area.

While a number of agencies and organisations were offering support to parents in various ways, concerns about ongoing resource provision were frequently expressed.

Support for parents of children in Primary School was not being specifically addressed, except through Parents' Rooms which are based in schools and not always well supported or attended. The need to offer early preventive support was identified as a way of avoiding later difficulties or crisis intervention. The Project worker contacted a number of parents through established groups in Primary Schools and Community Projects in the Greater Pilton area. Most of these parents had children between 5 and 12 years old, though some had older and younger children and some of the parents were also grandparents.

Most of the parents were women, despite attempts to make contact with fathers as well. These contacts and the information they provided was recorded and transcribed and provided the bulk of the data needed for the needs assessment report (*Parents Talking - Who's Listening*) published in early 1998.

Transition Group

A Transition Group for parents with children in nursery school and about to move on to Primary School was formed by the Project worker and another worker form the Muirhouse Under 12s and Parents Centre. Parents were contacted at the local Nursery and invited to attend.

The group was established to provide a forum for parents to articulate their concerns and raise issues of importance regarding this transition in their children's lives. Workers were able to offer practical help and suggestions to parents at this anxious time. The group ran for four weeks with six parents attending. Childcare was provided which all of the parents utilised.

Parents' Group

The Project worker started a parents' group once a week during which parents could raise issues and discuss concerns with other parents from the area. This group ran for eleven weeks and though the numbers fluctuated, attendance ranged from between eight to three parents weekly. The group was advertised through posters and by approaching parents at drop-off and pick-up points at Silverknowes Primary and Nursery School and at the After School Club. The group allowed parents the opportunity to identify their own support needs and participate in the Parenting Project.

While this group did succeed in identifying the type of issues parents were concerned about it soon became clear that a discussion based support group was not the kind of support, focus or activity which these parents needed.

Some parents had problems which were not specifically related to their children, such as housing and health issues. While the group had provided some degree of support to these parents, it soon became clear that a group which had a more collective purpose or identity would be more successful in terms of providing general support to a broader range of parents. In view of this, the development of Parents' Rooms in schools seemed to provide such an opportunity.

Other Contact Points

The Project worker was asked to speak to parents at the Pilton Reach Out Programme Stress Centre which had previously identified a number of concerns around parenting. This contact led to the worker providing a five week course for parents entitled 'Getting through the Day'.

No 20 Women and Children's Centre invited the Project worker to assist them in the planning and co-ordination of a one day seminar on parents and teenagers entitled 'Surviving the Teenage Years'.

A local Health Visitor is working in collaboration with another health professional from Pilton Community Health Project to establish and develop a support group for fathers. The Parenting Project is providing resources and childcare facilities to this group which is ongoing.

In 1997 a conference held by the Early Years Strategy Group in Pilton, made up of local organisations with an ongoing involvement in young children and families, led to the formation of the Parents' Action Group. This group aims to work with parents to ensure that they have more involvement with schools and organisations which their children are involved in.

The Project worker acts as a facilitator to this group which is looking at ways to support parents and advocate on their behalf. This work is ongoing with the Project providing support and childcare.

"We had a meeting with the teachers but it only went on for five minutes, I felt it could have gone on longer."

"...and then she went to school and that was it... and I am feeling quite alone and upset. You did not think it was going to be such a sad feeling."

Findings

What parents need in terms of support

The large number of contacts which the Project worker has made with both parents and organisations working in Greater Pilton has enabled us to identify the support needs of parents with children in Primary School. While a great number of specific issues arose, the following points form the main themes and suggestions.

Parents generally would like:

- more time with teachers to meet and discuss issues concerning their children
- more information about the school curriculum, the education system and the work their children are doing
- more involvement with their children's education
- to be involved in producing information for other parents
- to feel that they are being listened to and that their point of view is taken seriously
- a greater awareness of the difficulties working parents face in trying to be involved with the school
- more support for the development of Parents' Rooms in schools
- more support for parents experiencing difficulties such as an Outreach or Home Visiting Service.
- more information on child development especially in relation to children from 5 to 12 years.

Further Parental Concerns

Parents pointed out that they faced a range of difficulties raising children, often in sometimes adverse personal circumstances. Becoming a parent had a fundamental affect on their lives and many had felt unprepared for the enormous changes and responsibilities it brought. They had no training for parenting and most had learned by trial and error.

Parents felt that the school could do much to provide support as and when it was needed and that difficulties could then be addressed before they became insurmountable. Parents agreed that they wanted to do the best for their children but felt that schools could do more to help them ensure this by working together to find ways of reducing stress and helping children to feel more secure.

When children move on to Primary School many parents can experience feelings of loss and sadness as their children start to grow away from them and become more independent. While parents have more time for themselves at this point they also find that they have fewer opportunities to meet other parents, or to continue relationships established in the early years.

The contact which the nursery provided is no longer available at primary level and if parents do not have other interests or are unemployed, they can feel isolated and excluded

Parents were very concerned about bullying in school and felt that a closer relationship with the school could do much to tackle problems at an early stage and improve communications generally between pupils, parents and teachers.

School holidays were identified as a major source of frustration for parents. The long summer break, the staggered intake of Primary 1 children and regular in-service days when the school is closed, were identified as problematic for parents especially those who are employed. Lack of suitable childcare to cover these periods caused major problems for parents who feel that schools are not sufficiently aware of the difficulties working parents face in trying to balance work commitments with school events and timetables.

For parents of children with special needs or certain medical conditions their concerns were mainly around the need for clear guidelines regarding the handling and administration of medication. Parents felt that this was not always clearly defined and caused unnecessary anxiety for both parents and children. Closer contacts and clearer communication with the school was emphasised by parents in this situation.

Addressing Needs

Silverknowes Primary School - Parents' Room

The needs assessment clearly pointed to the importance for parents of developing closer and more supportive contacts with the school.

The most effective way of achieving this was felt to be by further developing the existing concept of Parents' Rooms in schools. The close contact which had developed between workers at the Muirhouse Project and the school, led to an invitation from the Head teacher to the Parenting Project worker to discuss the use of the Parents' Room at Silverknowes Primary School.

This room had existed for some time but had not been used as extensively as it could have been and thus offered the potential for further development. It is an unused classroom with a kitchen area at one end.

Following this discussion the Project worker visited the Parents' Room and met some of the parents. This provided an additional opportunity to meet with parents and discuss their needs as well as making more parents aware of the Positive Parenting initiative to support them.

The room was supported by the school, in particular the Senior teacher, whose remit was to work closely with parents. Parents were involved in a 'paired reading' scheme with their children and were encouraged to become more closely involved in school life. The teacher offered support and advice when required and parents welcomed the opportunity to learn new skills and to be valued as an important resource within the school. The Parents' Room was also being used to run a number of courses which were not always well supported.

The Project worker and the parents decided to firstly investigate why parents did not use the room. This resulted in a questionnaire which was designed by the parents and distributed to families via children at the school. Just under ten per cent of the questionnaires were returned but the survey confirmed that parents simply did not know that the Parents' Room existed. Parents indicated that they would like a facility which allowed them to drop in informally as well as allowing them to use it for meetings and other activities. These activities ranged from developing hobbies and interests to fund raising initiatives, activities with the children and running educational courses.

As a result of these findings and the ongoing and committed support of the Head teacher to developing this resource, a proposal was submitted and accepted for the Parenting Project worker to act as a facilitator in the development of a 'drop in' facility at the Parents' Room.

The Project worker has worked closely with parents since school recommenced in August '97 and in response to a poll for suggestions, changed the name to the Take-a-Break Room. The existence of the facility was widely promoted through the use of posters in school and by word of mouth etc. The Project worker has committed a set number of hours per week to this resource which will ensure that there is someone in attendance at a set time each week to welcome new members and provide information about the facility.

There are now more parents involved and actively working together to structure the use of the room. While the room is open all week for parents to drop in, there are structured sessions once a week to look at identified issues or to participate in leisure or craft activities. The issues which were identified include; dealing with stress, child behaviour and women and children's health.

These sessions are currently being organised by the Project worker and an agenda of activities has been drawn up to cover the early part of 1998.

During the coming year the Project worker will:

- offer continued support to parents at the Take-a-Break Room
- work with parents to develop skills required to manage the facility
- raise awareness of parents' needs in the school
- encourage parents to support each other
- support parents in their role as parents
- improve communication between parents and teachers
- encourage parental involvement in the school.

While the Project worker will continue to support the development of the Take-a-Break Room the long term objective is for parents to gradually take over the running of this resource.

A fuller evaluation will take place in mid 1998 which will be used to review progress and inform future planning.

Ongoing Involvement in Additional Support Initiatives

Parents' Action Group

Following the Early Years Strategy Conference in Pilton a number of parents decided to form a group to look at addressing some of the issues which arose at the conference. A meeting was organised for these parents by the Project worker who also agreed to act as facilitator for the group and to arrange childcare when required. The issues which this group of parents are currently trying to address are:

- the need for parents to be involved at all stages in the education of their children and to be encouraged to do so
- the difficulties parents face in securing adequate and relevant information about schools
- the need for parents to be supported through transition periods in their children's education and during any other difficulties which may arise
- the need to advocate on behalf of parents

Parents hope to tackle these issues by developing closer links between Teachers and Education Department Staff. They hope to encourage more parents to join them in their drive to secure some form of policy in relation to parental involvement with schools and the use of Parents' Rooms.

This group is still at an early stage in its development but will continue to be supported by the Project worker who will work with parents on an action plan and on raising the profile of the group.

Men's Group

A Health Needs Assessment undertaken by a locally based health worker specifically mentioned the importance of improving parenting support and the need to develop new areas of parenting work (*Boyce,1996*). The report recommended that such work be developed in collaboration with other local organisations who were in contact with parents.

While a number of local projects offered support to parents, invariably it was mothers rather than fathers who attended. This deficit is not a reflection on this particular area as this situation is replicated nationally in the low numbers of fathers who attend such groups.

In view of this a steering group was set up to look at ways of addressing this issue and the Project worker was invited to attend to advise the group. As a result of this a Father's Group was eventually set up when a number of local fathers were contacted. The Project worker is currently supporting the development of this group and is providing resources and childcare facilities. Following a positive initial evaluation another six to eight week course is planned which will look at a range of issues and support needs of fathers. This work is ongoing and will be evaluated at a later date.

Silverknowes School Initiative

The successful and supportive relationship which has been fostered with this school and in particular with the Head teacher has led to further discussions in relation to offering support to families facing particular difficulties. Parents as well as local agencies and organisations have identified this additional need and the benefits which can be gained from offering early support.

The Head teacher is keen to develop additional accessible support for families in this situation and to encourage parents to work with the school in addressing difficulties. This model of early prevention would aim to offer a range of support options to parents with parents freely selecting one which suited them if they wish to accept the offer of support.

The Project worker in collaboration with the Head teacher has contacted and established a group of local professionals who are willing to contribute to the development of this resource as well as offering practical assistance to parents if required.

The emphasis in developing this form of support is to assure parents that support structures can be arranged to suit individual needs and wishes. This initiative will be piloted shortly and will be facilitated by the Project worker and the Playworker.

Summary

The Project has been very successful in terms of identifying and defining the support needs of parents with primary school age children. It has also provided parents with an opportunity to articulate these needs and to work with a dedicated worker in identifying how these needs could be met. The extensive number of contacts made and the broad range of collaborative opportunities which the post has permitted, clearly demonstrates how much can be achieved.

The additional provision of a Playworker post has also provided a great deal of support to parents and helped to facilitate opportunities that may not otherwise have been possible.

In reflecting over the work during the first year a number of points clearly emerge. Parents want a closer and more supportive relationship with schools to ensure that they feel less isolated and removed from such an important part of their child's life. Parents' Rooms in schools offer such an opportunity but they are greatly dependant on schools supporting and encouraging the development of such a resource.

If close contacts can be established and maintained and difficulties tackled at an earlier stage, there are clear benefits to be gained for both parents and teachers.

The community development approach which underpins most of the work in Muirhouse has so far proved to be successful in terms of reaching a large number of parents. An extensive network of contacts has been developed and maintained, which has permitted the Project worker to be involved in providing support to a wide range of initiatives in the area. This has also provided the Positive Parenting Project with additional practical experience to draw on.

In contrast to this, the difficulties faced in setting up a new group to look at parenting issues needs to be recognised. Discussion based groups like this may have to deal with a range of issues and problems which can detract from the original purpose of the group.

Sustaining such groups is difficult and experience has shown that attendance tends to drop off to a point at which the group is no longer viable. Working with existing groups or forming groups with a collective purpose or identity, proved to be a much more successful way of reaching parents and developing appropriate support structures. This approach to working with parents is likely to be developed further.

The extensive research work, which occupied a great deal of time over the first year, provided a solid foundation on which to build. Producing a comprehensive needs assessment ensured that the work was clearly focused, appropriate and relevant and effectively utilised limited resources.

Parents have responded positively to setting their own agenda and working together to address common concerns. The stated objectives drawn up for the first year have all been addressed and next year the work will build on the lessons and experience which have emerged.

Future Work

Over the coming year the Project will work to develop the following areas:

- continue to develop Parents' Rooms both as a drop-in facility and as a way of offering more intensive support to parents and families experiencing difficulties
- investigate ways of further developing the use of Parents' Rooms
- continue to support the ongoing initiatives which have been established
- continue to work with parents in establishing closer links with schools
- continue to promote the Project and make contact with more parents in the area
- continue to establish the support needs of parents
- continue to research support for parents to inform the overall workplan

"I think there is a lack of information generally in schools - it's like teachers don't want to inform you of what's actually happening."

7 ...Niddrie Adventure Playground - Edinburgh

Background

Niddrie is part of the area in the south east of Edinburgh known as Greater Craigmillar. It covers an area of 5.7 square kilometres and has a resident population of approximately 11,494 people; which is 3 per cent of the Edinburgh city total.

The SCI Project, based in Niddrie since 1967, is known as the Niddrie Adventure Playground and supports work with young people aged between 5 - 25 years, growing up in this deprived community. It was set up at a time when Craigmillar was experiencing many of the social problems which now characterise the area.

The Adventure Playground has now become an established part of youth provision in the Niddrie/Craigmillar area and provides one of the few places in which children can safely play.

It provides a large outdoor playground which has a variety of activities: swings, climbing frames, football pitch etc and extensive indoor facilities which include a basketball area, kitchen, arts and crafts and computer room. The facilities are freely available to all local children and are open throughout the year.

The Project was initially set up to provide a safe, physical, social and emotional environment for children, young people and adults. It also wanted to promote the personal development of children and young people through play and a programme of interesting and stimulating activities.

Those attending the Project are encouraged to be actively involved in planning activities and to express and explore the issues which affect them. The Project is very much a community resource and parents are actively encouraged to become involved.

Social and Economic Environment

Craigmillar has been described as the most impoverished of all the larger Urban Aid eligible areas in the East of Scotland and in a deprivation analysis carried out by Lothian Regional Council in 1993, it had the highest score. Unemployment rates in Craigmillar have consistently been among the highest in Europe showing levels of 32 per cent and 20 per cent for men and women respectively in the 1991 census in comparison to 10 per cent and 6 per cent for the city of Edinburgh.

While absolute levels have fallen substantially, rates in Craigmillar have remained some 7 per cent above the city average.

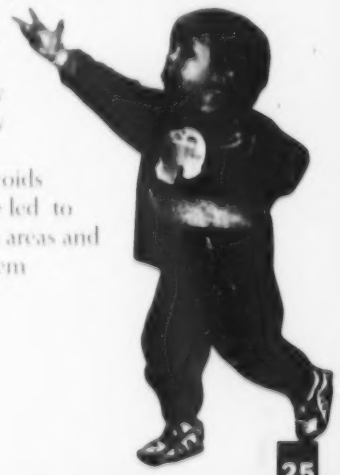
The census also revealed that 55 per cent of households with children had no earners, compared to just 10 per cent city wide and that 54 per cent of all those unemployed were aged between 16 and 34 years. The impact of these employment figures means that too few households have members in gainful employment and those that do, tend to be in low paid insecure jobs.

Just over 14 per cent of all households are headed by a single parent with children and one third of this group are young mothers aged between 16 and 24 years. Nearly 54 per cent of all children under 5 years live in lone parent households.

Over the years the turnover in the resident population has meant that economically active households have moved on and been replaced by more vulnerable and less stable groups which have experienced difficulties in accessing job opportunities. Low skills, poor transport, low morale and inefficient matching of residents to available opportunities have helped to create a pool of residents needing labour market help, which is constantly being recharged by an influx of new tenants.

The rapid depopulation over the last 30 years has had an impact of the quality of the housing stock and the surrounding environment in many parts of Craigmillar, including Niddrie. Areas with the least attractive housing stock have tended to lose stable households and been replaced by unemployed newcomers with little housing choice and multiple problems.

This has resulted in a high turnover of tenants, making any sense of community difficult to sustain. Persistent tenancy voids and vandalism have led to the decline of some areas and effectively made them



unlettable. Despite large sums being spent by a number of agencies on housing investment programmes the decline is still visible. In addition parents point to the lack of safe play areas for children in Craigmillar/Niddrie and to the problems which this can cause for families with young children.

Poverty is considered to be a major problem for a large number of families and children in the area. The problem is more than just a lack of income or receiving a low income, but about the inability to secure a basic standard of living.

Financial difficulties often results in people having to borrow money to obtain basic goods like clothing, fuel or baby equipment which can often exacerbate their financial difficulties.

In the Craigmillar area financial difficulties of this nature have been identified as a serious problem and have been a contributing factor in the isolation of families, especially young parents (*Campbell,1996*).

Health Concerns

The Health Committee of Lothian Regional Council produced a report examining the link between deprivation and health in 1993. The report examined birth data to assist in establishing priorities for health related services for young women and vulnerable families.

The report found that Craigmillar scored highly on a number of indicators including stillbirths and infant deaths, births to mothers under 20 years and births to unmarried parents and large families.

The results indicated a high level of health related need for young women and vulnerable families in the Craigmillar area.

Additional Concerns

For those living in the area the range of difficulties facing families are considerable. The above statistics are indicative of the considerable social, economic and health related issues and the related links between poverty levels and unemployment.

Unemployment rates, especially in households with children, and the large number of very young children living in lone parent households, create a range of difficulties particularly for young parents with small children.

A needs assessment undertaken by Save the Children in 1996 examined the particular issues for young parents living in the Niddrie and Craigmillar area (*Campbell,1996*). The research involved interviewing a number of organisations working in the area as well as some young parents. This work provided a clearer insight into the problems young parents experienced in their daily lives and pointed to a number of important issues.

The most important issue for young parents is poverty and debt. Many young parents had taken out loans or incurred catalogue debt in order to purchase baby goods, furniture and clothing or to pay for fuel. Crisis loans were also common which reduced the amount of money available through weekly benefits, as the repayments are deducted at source.

Poverty also contributed to the isolation felt by young parents. The costs incurred in using public transport often confined young parents to the immediate area, thus restricting their ability to participate in social or leisure activities.

Those without family in the area tended to feel particularly isolated, especially if they have very young children, as most of the available childcare provision is for children from two to five years.

Living in this type of isolation tends to contribute to feelings of loneliness, anxiety and stress, which were identified as health issues for young parents in this situation.

In relation to housing and the high turnover of residents in Craigmillar and Niddrie, young parents unfamiliar with the area often found themselves having to set up home and cope with starting a family simultaneously. Support is critical at this point and for those who did not have extended family in the area, the chances of a successful transition were lessened.

Some young people were reluctant to take up a tenancy, which in some cases meant they did not move in and neglected to inform the housing authorities. This inevitably led to rent arrears which often affected their ability to take up another tenancy.

Housing officers point to the difficulties young people have in becoming householders and the limited ability many have to be able to budget and organise a home effectively. Parents pointed to the lack of facilities for children in the area and the difficulties this caused for them.

Many children are confined to the home and the care of parents all day as the lack of childcare and safe play areas does not allow for any form of respite. Parents indicated the importance of support with their children and the need for them to be able to access training and leisure facilities which they felt were important for their personal development and recreation.

Without access to family support this is extremely difficult to achieve.

In a further piece of research undertaken by the Craigmillar Detached Youth Work Project the experiences of young mothers in the area were examined. The report produced by this investigation indicated a number of further issues which need to be addressed in any work with parents.

The majority of parents were generally very fulfilled by the roles as parents and while they tended to look to each other for support this was often inconsistent and occasionally exploitative. Their main needs centred around insufficient income and lack of quality time for themselves. Lack of income made it difficult to socialise with friends and lack of child care made it difficult to get time away from their child.

These young parents needed to be able to enjoy themselves as young people and to have time away on their own.

Despite the large number of resources in the area, parents, in particular mothers, find it difficult to participate in an activity or seek support because of the difficulties in accessing childcare.

Families which may be experiencing difficulties find that the focus of many sources of support tend to be on the needs of the child, often at the expense of any parent related needs. There are no services in the area which take a holistic approach to young people as parents and address their needs both as young people and as parents.

"I think a lot of people with problems, it would help them to talk about it... even in a group, if it is confidential people come out with things."

Parenting Project

In view of the high number of young parents in the Niddrie/Craigmillar area, the needs of this group are the main focus of the Parenting Project. Taking account of the research already undertaken in the area the work will focus on a number of key issues around isolation, poverty, self-help, child-care, training and employment.

The project will examine the needs of young parents between 16 and 25 years and will endeavour to explore the most appropriate ways of supporting them. The general aims for this aspect of the Project are to:

- reduce the feeling of isolation among young parents
- research and identify the support needs of young parents of pre-school and primary aged children
- develop a user led self-help befriending network for young parents
- liaise with Community Education and training and employment agencies in identifying issues relating to young parents
- promote children's rights and associated parental responsibilities in ensuring those rights
- facilitate a range of training opportunities as identified by young parents.

Funding provides for one part-time Groupworker who will work with parents as well as engage in outreach work with other agencies.

When required, a creche facility is available, using the extensive facilities available at the Centre.

The emphasis is on identifying the various needs of this group and working with them to provide support and activities as well as identifying any training needs. Thus based on the above aims, the work over the first year concentrated on the following objectives:

- contact other organisations working with families in the area to inform them about the work
- establish contact with local young parents to identify needs
- establish how identified needs can be addressed
- set up support group for young parents

Findings

Over the first year the work concentrated on two main areas: trying to make contact with young parents and other organisations to examine needs and establishing how the Project could help to meet those needs.

Using an existing contact with a local Youth Outreach Worker the Project got off to a promising early start. Previously this worker had been involved with a group of young people, some of whom were parents. This group had disbanded, due to lack of funding, but one member of the group contacted the Project Manager and a meeting was arranged.

This parent was enthusiastic about becoming involved in a young parents' group and wished to actively participate. Meanwhile posters advertising the Project were circulated in the area at strategic points and a number of other organisations were contacted.

This parent successfully recruited three other young parents who had expressed an interest in attending. Raising awareness about the group through personal contacts was a much more successful method than using posters, which had failed to attract much attention. In this area a large number of posters compete with each other with the result that many are often ignored.

First Young Parents' Meeting

The first meeting took place early in the year and a small number (four) attended. The group decided that the term Positive Parenting was not very appealing as it sounded 'patronising' and may deter other young people from attending. In view of the strength of feeling on this issue the name was changed to 'The Young Parents Initiative'. The group agreed to meet on Tuesdays between 11.30am and 1.30pm and a creche was arranged to cover this time each week.

The group identified a number of activities and training opportunities they would like to participate in, which generally related to personal health and safety, first aid and issues in relation to taking up a first tenancy. At this time the Project was approach by the Bridges One Door Initiative who wished to pilot a project aimed at raising awareness of the factors affecting young people and parents taking up their first tenancy and living on their own in mainstream housing.

This was discussed with the young parents and they all decided to attend. The course covered a range of topics including tenancy responsibilities, home security, accident prevention, personal safety and home energy advice.

The young parents attended most of the sessions on this six week course and found it informative and worthwhile. The group met regularly once a week and attendance was fairly consistent, though difficulties arose in trying to recruit other members.

The Project Manager then involved the parents in the recruitment of a part-time Group Worker who was to work more closely with them and develop the work. One parent helped to design the recruitment advertisement and to interview the short listed candidates.

A Group Worker was subsequently appointed to take over the running of the group from the Project Manager.

However, by the middle of the year attendance had started to fluctuate greatly and despite a concerted effort on the part of the group and the Group Worker to recruit other young parents, no new members attended. While the parents still met regularly and organised various activities together it was difficult to maintain momentum and harmony within such a small group.

In addition to this, a number of other issues directly affected the development of the group and the objectives of the Parenting Project. Due to staff related difficulties, support for the new Group Worker in taking over of the running of the group was problematic. This had a major impact on the continuity of work as the post is part-time and dependent on the support of a full time member of staff.

"When she went to school I was totally lost... I didn't know what to do with myself."

"If you are confident in where your child's going then you pass your confidence over to them."

At this early stage in the work the contacts with other agencies and organisations had not yet been fully developed and hence this affected any referrals which may have been forthcoming from this source. In addition, a Playwork Skills course, which a number of young parents had expressed interest in, had to be cancelled due to these ongoing difficulties.

The remaining members of the group decided not to meet over the summer holidays but during this period became involved in other things and were not in a position to return again. One decided to do a course which meant she could not attend on Tuesdays. In view of this, the remainder of the year concentrated on contacting and informing other organisations about the Project but, given the limitations of a part-time post, this time consuming activity is still in progress.

Nevertheless a number of new contacts have been extremely positive and are currently being developed.

Implications for Support

Over the course of the first year a number of issues have emerged in relation to developing and delivering support to young parents in this age group.

While we are aware that a large number of young parents live in Niddrie, it is particularly difficult to attract the interest of these young people as a group. Young people have a variety of personal needs which are often unrelated to their needs as parents, but this must be acknowledged in trying to design and offer support.

Generally these parents take their parenting role very seriously, but they also want opportunities for personal and social development with other young people. Activities must then be tailored to meet these needs and offer quality childcare to enable them to attend.

Unless young parents are in contact, either formally or informally, with other agencies or organisations, making contact poses major challenges. Young people are not always willing to join a group unless they already know existing members or they have another friend who is willing to join with them. Previous work with young people has shown that word of mouth is generally the most effective way of raising awareness about support, as well as informing other agencies and organisations in contact with this group of people. Expressions of interest can then be followed up by a meeting to provide further information.

In addition, there is an exceptionally high turnover of residents in the Niddrie/Craigmillar area and frequently the offer of a tenancy there is not always welcome. If there is no extended family or friendship network living in the area to offer support, a tenancy may only be taken up for a short time or in some cases accepted but not taken up at all.

If young parents do not intend to stay in the area they may not feel it worthwhile to become involved in a group and meet new people. In these particular circumstances making contact with young parents and meeting their support needs becomes a very challenging task which may well require an approach which concentrates on providing short-term informal support.

In view of the above, the work with young parents in Niddrie will build on the findings of the first year and develop a more collaborative approach in trying to reach this group. A number of contacts made in the latter half of the year have led to a number of promising initiatives being planned for the early part of the second year of the Project.

In addition, The Project worker is looking at the feasibility of establishing a local advisory group to promote the work of the Project and make contact with young parents locally.

Nursery School

A number of young parents have children in a local nursery which the Project worker has been in contact with. To establish support issues, these parents completed a questionnaire administered by the nursery which identified a preference to look at a healthy eating course. After negotiating this with the parents, a course entitled *'Healthy Family Eating on a Budget'* has been organised.

The course will look at a range of issues in relation to food, hygiene and involving children and will be offered to parents at the nursery, with any remaining places being offered to parents linked to other agencies. This work is currently ongoing and plans to explore how other learning needs that may be identified could be met.

Young People Speak Out

This Edinburgh based video project is currently working with the Project worker on an initiative to explore the issues affecting young parents in Niddrie. This work aims to involve young parents in producing a video which would look at what is on offer to them in the area and highlight issues of concern for them as young parents.

A taster session is planned followed by a series of six workshops. This ongoing work hopes to attract young parents and provide opportunities to learn a new skill and meet other young people. Childcare will be provided to support this work.

"You just love them to bits no matter what. You may shout at them but you still love them."

"I think they (employers) need to know that your kid is the most important thing in your life."

Summary

Initially, the work with the young parents' group promised to provide a potentially positive example of how support to young parents could be developed. However, due to a number of concurrent events and circumstances the group was difficult to sustain and eventually no longer viable.

The difficulties in firstly, attracting young people and secondly, sustaining and supporting their ongoing involvement should not be underestimated.

Staff related resource difficulties at such an early stage in the Project had a major impact of the continuity and development of the work. These unforeseen events prevented a number of tasks from being completed and these effectively had to be postponed until a later date. Continuity plays an important part in building up a relationship with any group and lack of it can have a major impact.

Contacting and developing support to young parents is a difficult task and must recognise that not only are the needs of this group multifarious, but that as a group they are difficult to reach and maintain contact with. Enabling this group to participate in activities which interest them as young people is essential, as long as childcare is built in.

The second year on the Project aims to build on the lessons and experiences of the first year and hence work will concentrate on the following areas:

- continue to promote the Parenting Project with other agencies and organisations in the area
- develop a collaborative network of contacts to look at ways of reaching and supporting young parents
- continue to identify the support needs of this group and how these can be addressed
- continue to develop, support and extend ongoing work

8 ...The Rosemount Project - Royston Glasgow

Background

The Rosemount Project in Glasgow city was set up in the late 80's in response to the extensive poverty evident in the area known as the Royston Corridor. This area was deemed to be comparable to the highest level of poverty in Britain at the time and continues to experience extreme levels of poverty today.

The area also lacked an adequate level of childcare facilities and this was considered to have a direct affect on the ability of lone parents, in particular women, to take up employment or training opportunities.

In the early 90's an SCF study highlighted the increasing scale of child poverty in Scotland and the 1991 census drew attention to the extensive deprivation experienced by residents in specific areas. In response to information drawn from the census, the Royston Corridor was designated a Special Initiative Area by Strathclyde Regional Council in 1993. This covered a population of 9,698 and took in the areas of Sighthill, Roystonhill, Germiston, Blackhill and Provanmill (*Gallagher, 1996*).

Concern about conditions in the area is reflected by the fact that it now has Priority Partnership Status and in a recent report produced by City of Glasgow Council, was identified as the ward with the highest level of unemployment in Glasgow (*Economic Regeneration Unit, 1997*)

The area suffers from high unemployment, economic decline, low levels of higher and further education, crime, poverty and poor health. Almost 50 per cent of families here are lone parent families, in comparison to 27 per cent and 18 per cent in Glasgow and Strathclyde.

It has a higher than average percentage of the population under five years of age and a higher than average elderly population. Unemployment levels currently run at about 44 per cent, which is more than double the levels of District and Regional unemployment. The area has lost major employers in recent years and of those that remain, each employ less than 20 people (*Tennant et al, 1996*).

A Poverty Profile of Royston and Germiston drew attention to the woefully inadequate levels of child provision, which greatly impacts on any parents wishing to pursue employment opportunities or training. This causes severe difficulties for those who do not have access to a network of family or friends prepared to assist with childcare.

Only about 17 per cent of the under five population are served by facilities offering full day care (*Tennant et al, 1996*).

The Rosemount Project offers a locally based integrated quality childcare and training centre as part of an anti-poverty strategy. Training is aimed specifically at women, and in particular lone parents, with childcare services creating developmental opportunities for children.

By providing vocational training, opportunities can be created to enable women to take up further education or employment. The objectives of the Rosemount Project can be summarised in the following way:

- To enable local women with children to enter the labour market by creating access to training and employment opportunities for single parents through the provision of locally based quality childcare facilities and 'access/bridging training' in vocational skills.
- To support, co-ordinate and expand childcare services.
- To encourage community involvement in the operation of the centre.
- To create access to information on issues of relevance to the needs of families with young children and increase local family support provision.

The provision of quality childcare and vocational training for women were key elements of the SCF's anti-poverty strategy, and the integrated model at Rosemount was an innovative approach to tackling poverty and combining social welfare and economic development objectives.

The initiative was further developed in 1992 by accessing European Social Funding and establishing a financial partnership with Strathclyde Regional Council, Education Department in order to utilise the Urban Programme for match funding purposes. This funding has allowed Save the Children to implement a strategy to address poverty issues for families and enable services to be developed at Rosemount (*Gallagher, 1996*).

Save the Children's Project in Rosemount provides training opportunities and childcare for parents and families to enable them to move out of the poverty trap and exert more control over their economic circumstances. It operates a quality day care service for children age 6 months to 5 years, with places arranged on a flexible basis to meet the needs of families using the service. Sixty per cent of these places are reserved for trainees within the project. After school care is also provided with places existing for up to 24 children aged 5-12 years who are collected from local schools.

Training has been developed in line with locally identified interests and in relation to labour market needs.

Currently the Project offers training in Childcare, Social Care, Computing and English for Speakers of Other Languages.

Entry to the course is restricted to women who live in the area and satisfy certain age and unemployment criteria. Demand for these courses is high and currently plans are in place to extend the range of training offered. In addition the Project is also accredited as a training centre by the Scottish Qualifications Agency, thus enabling local people to gain nationally recognised qualifications from a community base.

The Project has developed close links with a number of local organisations and has worked with Health Visitors, Social Work Department, Psychological Services, Schools and other organisations delivering family support and childcare services.

This multi-agency approach and the innovative work carried out in the Project has therefore provided staff with a close understanding of the issues and problems which families in this area face. Through their work with women and children, often over a long period of time, it became clear that many families faced specific difficulties with their children which were often related to the many other difficulties they faced in their lives.

"It has changed my life, it has made me think. I don't smack my son any more and this has made such a difference in our relationship."

Parenting Issues

Staff at the Project had been aware for some time of a number of women for whom parenting pre- five children was presenting problems; most commonly through behavioural difficulties with their children. This gap in provision led to the decision to set up a group which would look at parenting issues and how parents could be better supported.

The Project recognised that parents often faced a range of difficulties in their daily lives that could impact on their ability to cope with young children and to pursue their parenting role confidently. By providing a group setting in which parents could express both their joys and frustrations, difficulties could be explored more positively and solutions and strategies developed.

In 1993 a parenting course entitled 'Working with Parents for Change' was developed by psychologists at Strathclyde Regional Council, Renfrew District. This particular programme addressed many of the parenting issues which staff at the project had identified with parents. Subsequently, this course was piloted at the Project and an evaluation showed that parents found the self-help and supportive nature of the group helpful and indicated a need for support of that nature to continue.

In view of the extreme social and economic conditions experienced by families in the Royston Corridor and the specific needs of parents using the project, the Positive Parenting Project was developed. The Project aims to promote parenting by working with parents to examine their support needs. The main objectives of this approach are:

- To raise awareness of the importance of parenting and its impact on child development.
- To ensure that parents are better supported
- To raise awareness of children's rights and parental responsibilities.

The Project has utilised the 'Working with Parents for Change' programme which is designed to help parents develop their knowledge and understanding of the factors affecting children's behaviour.

It also helps parents to examine and enhance their parenting skills and in doing so, learn alternative ways of managing behaviour.

The Project funds one full time Groupworker who is supported by two part-time Childcare Workers. The Groupworker aims to be responsive to the needs of parents in delivering parenting programmes and will develop links with other organisations and groups locally to set in place referral systems, including self-referral.

From the above aims, more specific objectives were developed to cover the first year of the Project. These were to:

- contact other organisations working with parents and families in the area to inform them about the work, identify gaps and establish support needs
- contact parents to identify issues and support needs and how these can be addressed
- set up parent support groups using the 'Working with Parents for Change' material.

The First Year

Over the first year the work concentrated on two main areas; promoting, setting up and running groups for parents and identifying the issues which arose from these contacts.

Initially the work focused on raising awareness with a range of local agencies and organisations. The Project worker contacted social workers, health visitors, doctors, community workers, primary and nursery schools, parent and toddler groups and staff at various voluntary agencies in the area. These meeting were usually face to face and provided an opportunity to promote the work with parents and explore ways of working collaboratively.

Parents attending the Rosemount Project were informed about the initiative and invited to speak to the project worker if they required further information. Posters were placed at strategic points in the area advertising the Project and the first course started in May 1997.

In all, three courses were held over the first year using the 'Working with Parents for Change' material and in addition one assertiveness course for parents was also organised. Two courses were held at the Rosemount Project; one was held at a local health centre and another at a local Parent and Toddler Group.

The two courses which were run at the Rosemount Project were set up specifically for this purpose and promoted as a parenting course to help parents cope with any difficulties. The Project worker organised and delivered these courses. The other two courses were the result of a collaborative initiative with an existing Parent and Toddler group and Possil Health Centre.

These two groups already had parents who had expressed an interest in such a course and in both cases the Project worker ran the courses with a community worker and a health worker respectively. Childcare was arranged in each case.

Individual evaluations were conducted using weekly evaluation sheets which provided feedback from both parents and course facilitators. In addition, two of the courses had end-of-course focus group sessions which were recorded and transcribed. These methods and the personal accounts provided by the course facilitators, provided a great deal of information about the delivery and impact of this type of support.

Findings

While a number of positive findings emerged from the evaluation an equal number of additional issues surfaced which need to be highlighted in planning similar initiatives.

Support

Parents generally found that the courses were enjoyable, worthwhile, informative and a welcome source of support. Each parent felt that they had gained personally by attending and that the problems which had originally led to them joining the group had been alleviated to a certain extent.

If a particular parenting problem had not altogether been resolved, parents had acquired some strategies for dealing with it.

Parents reported feeling more self-aware and reflective as the course had allowed them to view the issues from another perspective. Being part of a group had also provided mutual support by allowing parents the opportunity to listen to each other and share common experiences.

Impact on Children

Parents felt that their relationship with their children had certainly improved as they developed techniques to handle situations which had previously led to conflict. Often this meant making a small adjustment to the way in which they handled situations or just simply spending more time with their children and learning how to give positive attention.

Anxiety levels were reduced as parents learned to be more aware of their reactions and how these influenced outcomes. Thus the course content and the positive affect it had on the parent/child relationship was welcomed. In addition each course had built in childcare which was also viewed very positively, as many parents would not have been able to attend if this resource had not been available.

However, a number of other important issues came to light which need to be highlighted.

Attendance

While parents found these course appealing, attendance was not always consistent or regular. Numbers attending ranged from four parents in one course to two in another. In one course attendance fluctuated so much that each week a different combination of parents appeared, though numbers here were higher and ranged from six to ten. Parents were not always able to attend each session but indicated that they would like to have this form of support available to them.

They gave a variety of reasons for non-attendance at a session but very few dropped out completely and most did return at some point. While some parents may welcome the mutual support which a group structure can offer, other parents may not require this and would prefer to consider a less structured 'drop-in' type service.

"My seven year old wants to stay out and play with the older children, but I am always worried. It is not safe enough around here."

Collaboration and Joint Practice

It would appear that running courses or offering support through existing groups may be a more effective way of contacting parents. Collaborating with other agencies and organisations already in contact with parents is also a more efficient use of limited resources.

Initiatives of this kind also provide opportunities for joint practice between workers from different disciplines, which also maximises resources and offers mutual support. Where this has occurred the Project worker found that the support which such an arrangement offered was very positive.

While the parents who did attend were positive about the courses, the low numbers involved indicates that the Project will review the way in which support of this nature is delivered in the future and will where possible seek to develop collaborative and joint practice arrangements with other organisations.

Structure of Support

The evaluations revealed that while parents enjoyed the course they were reluctant about committing to a course for a set number of weeks. When asked about the type of support they would have preferred, parents felt that a less formal approach which would allow them to attend when they wanted, would have been more suitable. Parents expressed a preference for support which covered a broad range of issues such as health, safety, childcare and child development etc, as this would then allow them to select the ones which interested them and elect to attend on those occasions.

Parents felt that courses which were based solely on looking at parenting skills failed to recognise the range of concerns and needs parents have.

For those living in an area with a high level of social and economic deprivation, basic material needs as well as individual personal needs, caused greater concern than their parenting skills. In most cases these other needs impacted directly on their ability to provide adequate parenting, which as a factor is not always obvious or straightforward to accommodate in designing and delivering support.

Promoting Parenting Work

Promoting or advertising courses or programmes which focused solely on parenting skills tended to be viewed negatively and is some cases deterred parents from attending. Those that did attend, remarked about the negative attitude they encountered when friends and family learned about their participation. People generally felt that parenting courses were aimed at families who were having serious problems with their children and did not consider that they may be of benefit to parents generally. This negative perception is likely to have had an impact on attendance levels and will need to be taken into account in developing more 'parent friendly' approaches.

Diversity of Needs

Parents invariably reported feeling ill prepared for the responsibilities and demands of parenthood and the reality of having a child proved to be more difficult than they had anticipated.When asked about how they felt future courses should be designed, they indicated that the emphasis should be more on the social aspects of attending a support group and offer parents a chance to look at a broad range of issues which addressed both parents and children's needs.

Health and safety issues were as important to parents as parenting skills and support which offered a combination of both was felt to be more in line with their needs.

The majority of parents who joined one of the parenting courses did so because they had a specific problem with their child. These 'problems' however were often related to the developmental stage their child was at, though few parents realised this fully. Parents were generally not well informed about child development and how each stage affected behaviour and ability.

Conclusions - Implications for the Future

Over the past year the Project has worked closely with a number of parents and has acquired a valuable insight into some of the difficulties which must be overcome if support to parents is to match their needs. The parenting work in Rosemount is committed to designing and delivering appropriate support for parents and a number of important points have emerged which will help to inform the work over the coming year.

The Parenting Project work will now be developed within the newly established Child and Family Team at the Rosemount Project. As part of the Development Team at Rosemount the Project work will take a more strategic approach by becoming more integrated into the overall programme at Rosemount. The Project worker will also play an active role in a 'Supporting Parents Supporting Children Programme' at the Rosemount Project which will provide opportunities for joint practice and skills development.

In addition, there will be increased collaboration with a range of agencies including Child Poverty Forum Project, Greater Glasgow Health Board and a range of local anti-poverty groups.

Based on recent experience the following issues will be considered in planning future support work:

- parents have a variety of needs which must be acknowledged in designing support
- some parents would prefer to have access to a range of flexible, informal, general support rather than commit to a formal structured course
- collaboration and joint practice with existing organisations and agencies to provide support can lead to a more efficient use of resources
- parents would prefer support to balance parents' needs with children's needs and provide opportunities for personal and social development along with child development and caring for children
- quality childcare is essential if parents are to access support

In view of the findings over the first year the following areas of work have been identified and are currently ongoing. In all cases creche facilities will be available.

Workshop

A one day workshop will be held to look at parents' needs and children's needs. This will raise awareness locally about the Project and provide a greater insight into the range of needs which exist in the area.

Parent and Toddler Group

Another course is planned with this group early in the next year following an invitation from the Group Organiser. The last course was well received, despite the fact that not all parents managed to attend each of the sessions. Parents would now like to look at other issues on a more informal basis and the Project worker is designing a course of sessions which are flexible and in line with parents' needs.

Possil Health Centre

Following last year's course the centre would like to do some more work with parents and this is currently being explored with professionals there. Previously, this course ran with just two parents, but was a welcome support at that time which greatly benefited those it reached. Doctors at the centre are keen to work with health visitors and the Project worker to deliver this type of additional support.

Drop-In Facility

This facility is planned early in the second year in response to parents' requests for a less formal support structure. This resource will be piloted at the Rosemount Project with a view to providing it as an ongoing resource.

Red Road Women's Centre

In response to a request from this group the Project worker will deliver a parenting course in the early part of '98. The proposal which was accepted includes child development, safe and healthy environments and communicating with children. The session will run for six weeks.

Thus the aims for the following year are to:

- continue to raise awareness of the importance of parenting and its impact on child development
- continue to develop appropriate support for parents
- continue to identify the support needs of parents
- build on the experiences and lessons of the first year
- develop and build on contacts with local organisations and agencies working with parents and families and identify opportunities for collaborative work

9 ...Summary and Main Findings

The first year of the Positive Parenting Project has focused extensively on listening to parents and allowing them to identify the issues which they feel are important in terms of meeting both their own needs and the obligations and responsibilities of raising their children.

We have consulted with over three hundred parents during that time, who have welcomed the opportunity to articulate their concerns and contribute to the design and planning of support structures for the Project. Many of these parents continue to be involved with the Project in various ways.

Working in partnership with parents to understand and meet their needs is a fundamental part of our overall strategy to ensure that resources are utilised effectively and designed to be sustainable in the long term. We value their continued involvement with the Project and acknowledge the significant contribution they have made and continue to make.

Parents have identified a range of important issues which they would like support structures to address. These supports have been developed in a variety of ways in each of the four communities across the Project and have provided opportunities to further our understanding of the many issues facing parents today.

The enormous social, economic and demographic changes of the last thirty years have had a major impact on families and many parents today feel that the range of pressures on them and on their children, have increased greatly.

As society becomes less influenced by collective and traditional frames of reference, it is being replaced by a society in which risks and opportunities confront both children and adults alike. Children are exposed to the same cultural pressures as adults, and are targeted as economic actors in their own right. For parents experiencing adverse circumstances, these pressures are magnified. Environmental, social and economic factors have a major impact on outcomes for children and on parents' ability to parent effectively.

Increasingly parents and parenting have featured regularly in the media and in a number of recent political statements. Parenting is now recognised as having a crucial impact on outcomes for children and young people and parents have been the target of social and political pressure to be more formative, vigilant and caring towards their offspring.

With an increasing number of children living in poverty and an increase in the number being raised by a lone parent, the importance of ensuring that parents have access to support, however that may be defined, is even greater. The parents we have had contact with have articulated many of these issues and thus, based on that information and our experience of working with parents, the following points draw together the main issues that have been identified across the Project.

Resource Information

Parents generally felt that they do not have sufficient information about the range of available local services and resources which could provide additional support to them if and when required. Parents tended to rely on others to direct them to appropriate services and in this respect health visitors and social workers played an important role. This often meant that parents were unable to access appropriate resources simply because they did not know how or who to approach in order to access the relevant information.

For parents experiencing difficulties it is essential that they have clear information which directs them to a source which can provide assistance. While a range of family support services do exist in many communities they frequently lack co-ordination and access is often dependant on individual knowledge of what is available locally.

Where services and resources work collaboratively to promote the needs of parents, preventive models of working are much more likely to be effective and more likely to reach those who need them. Providing clear 'user friendly' information to families about local and national resources would help to ensure that they were made much more accessible to parents. This need for co-ordinated information is relevant at every stage of parenthood and would satisfy a fundamental support need for many parents.

In Angus this is being directly addressed with the production of an information leaflet which will provide a comprehensive list of sources of support and information for parents and families.

Child Development

Parents generally feel that they do not have sufficient knowledge in relation to child development. This frequently means that parents do not realise that certain child behaviour issues are often related to a developmental stage. Parents tend to view these episodes in terms of 'behavioural problems' which some parents experience great difficulty coping with.

This can then lead to feelings of inadequacy and stress, especially if parents do not have friends or extended family support close by. In most cases reassurance and some relevant advice helps to solve the difficulty and enable parents to work it through for themselves.

As families become smaller and more and more experience breakdown, the support and advice which an extended family would have provided is often no longer available. For many parents, especially lone parents, juggling the responsibilities of home and work or living in poverty, these difficulties can be a source of additional strain.

Parents experiencing behavioural difficulties with their children found that sharing their concerns, especially with other parents who had experienced similar difficulties, was particularly helpful and reassuring. Providing information, advice and guidance to parents which is relevant to their child's developmental stage would do much to reduce the anxiety that some parents experience and help to strengthen the parent-child relationship by raising parental awareness of their child's changing developmental needs.

Child development issues are being addressed across the Project in response to parents identifying the need to learn more about their children's social, emotional and physical development. Parents have requested support around such issues as healthy eating, first aid, temper tantrums, sleeping and eating problems, bed wetting,speech problems and supporting children through a range of transitions from early and middle childhood on to the teenage years.

Contact with Schools

Many parents expressed a great deal of concern about their children as they enter the education system and move from nursery to primary school and then on to secondary school. When children start school, many parents lose contact with the supportive structures which have been available to them until then, such as health visitors, nursery staff, and parent and toddler groups.

This can be a very difficult period for parents who reported feelings of exclusion and isolation as their contact with the school decreases. In particular, parents of middle years children and adolescents felt that there was very little available to them which allowed them to continue with the contacts that had been established when their children were younger.

Thus while this support network tends to decrease as children get older; parental concerns for their children's welfare tend to increase as they become exposed to more external influences and enter adolescence. Parents with older children would therefore welcome some form of support which addressed these particular concerns.

Parents would welcome a much closer relationship with schools and some form of involvement, however small, in their child's education. The limited contact between parents and teachers was a source of concern, with parents reporting that in general, teachers do not spend enough time with parents to listen to their concerns.

Parents feel that their input into schools is not always welcomed or valued and that their point of view is not always seriously addressed. In this respect parents feel that a much closer relationship with teachers and the school generally would help to improve communications and enable problems or concerns to be identified and addressed at a much earlier stage. This they feel would have clear benefits for both teachers and parents, as well as children.

For those parents whose children have special needs or certain medical conditions, the need to improve communication was even greater, in order to reassure parents that their children's needs were being adequately addressed.

"Support is being there whatever the situation, good or bad, it doesn't matter."

Parents also expressed grave concerns about bullying in schools and how it is handled. They also felt that a general lack of understanding existed about the difficulties parents face in trying to balance work commitments with school arrangements and holidays.

In Muirhouse, the issues surrounding parents and contact with schools is being directly addressed with the establishment of Parents' Rooms in local schools which are developing support around the issues which parents have identified.

Impact on Children

The direct impact on children of supporting parents was not measured in any systematic way but was based on feedback from parents about any changes they felt had occurred as a result of their contact with the Project.

Parents felt that the support they had received from other parents in group settings combined with the opportunity to share concerns and problems, had helped them to be more self-aware in their role and reduce feelings of isolation which many had reported. Simply knowing that other parents were experiencing the same problems was a source of reassurance, while increasing child development knowledge provided them with strategies for dealing more effectively with certain situations.

This sometimes just involved parents making a little more time for their children at certain points in the day and giving more positive attention. Parents reported that small adjustments in how they reacted to situations could produce enormous benefits and that as a result their relationship with their child had been greatly improved.

Parents reported feeling more self-confident in their abilities as they became more aware of how to handle difficult situations and to avoid conflict. Parents reported feeling less anxious about situations which would previously have caused concern and that as a result their relationship with their child had become more positive.

Preparation for Parenthood

Invariably, parents were not fully aware of the impact a child would have on their lives and felt ill prepared for the task. For many, the reality of being a parent proved to be far more demanding that they had realised and many felt overwhelmed by the range of tasks and skills required.

Many supported the idea of parenting awareness classes for young people to ensure that they were better prepared to meet the responsibilities required to raise a child and make informed choices. They felt that schools should support such an initiative and ensure that young people are fully aware of the impact a child will have on their lives and career plans. Such courses could be combined with sex education in schools.

Most parents felt that they did not have sufficient knowledge about parenting skills as such and relied mainly on intuition and their own parenting experience. Many turned to family and friends for support but for some parents who did not have family close by, this much needed resource was not always available.

Parents are committed to doing the best they can for their child, often in difficult personal and economic circumstances. They already have a range of existing skills that must be acknowledged and built on if they express an interest in acquiring additional skills to help them with their child. The provision of non-stigmatising support is therefore essential in reaching parents who may wish to seek such assistance.

In Angus, a pilot programme is planned in a local high school which will raise awareness in young people about parenting and help them to identify the issues which will enable them to make informed choices.

Promoting Parenting Work

In terms of actually promoting parenting work with parents, the issue raises a number of concerns and underlying tensions. Parents tend to view courses, in which the main focus is clearly on improving parenting skills, as a negative concept and expressed a clear reluctance to participate.

Some parents have been deterred from attending because they associate 'parenting courses' with 'bad parenting' and feel that attendance would be stigmatising. Fear of being labelled in this way clearly deters parents from seeking parenting skills support and therefore, if such support is to be developed a greater awareness of these issues needs to be acknowledged.

In addition, courses in which the main focus is on acquiring or improving parenting skills fail to acknowledge and address the variety of personal needs which parents have.

For parents living in difficult circumstances, these issues can seriously impact on their ability to provide effective parenting and hence any support structures which fail to adapt to this will have limited success in both reaching and sustaining contact with parents.

In addition, parents also expressed a reluctance to commit to a parenting support course which required attendance over a set period of time. While many parents were positive about the benefits of attending such a resource, the flexibility of having access to a more informal ongoing range of support was felt to be of greater long term benefit and better suited to certain parents' needs.

A 'drop in' type facility which parents could attend when they wished was an option many parents would prefer in addition to other types of available support. Small informal groups working with parents at playgroups, parent and toddler groups and other existing groups which they attend, was also viewed positively as support is offered to the group rather than having to be sought out individually.

Collaboration and Joint Practice

Collaborating with other agencies and organisations working to support parents and families is the most effective way of reaching parents and meeting their needs. This allows resources to be co-ordinated effectively and tailored to individual needs.

Health visitors and primary health care professionals as well as social workers and community education workers, play a vital role in identifying and meeting parents' needs.

Collaboration also offers the potential to merge two or more resources, often at minimal additional cost, and also provides mutual professional support in meeting identified needs.

Childcare

Without the provision of quality childcare many parents would not have been able to attend parenting groups and support programmes or participate in the needs assessment.

This resource is essential if parents are to access support. Childcare was also identified as an important factor for parents who wish to avail themselves of training or employment opportunities or simply to have some time for themselves. Affordable and accessible nursery places and childcare were identified as the most significant form of practical support which parents would like to have available to them.

Gender issues

The majority of contact with parents has invariably been with mothers, as we have had very limited contact with fathers. The difficulties in reaching fathers has been acknowledged as a significant issue which may require a specific approach. However, children are now being raised in a diverse range of situations and circumstances and for many children, fathers have a limited involvement in their lives. With an increasing number of children now being raised by lone mothers and changing work patterns which have increased the average number of working hours per week, mothers tend to shoulder the burden of responsibility with regard to their children and hence are more likely than fathers to seek support.

We are currently working to include fathers more and to increase our understanding of their specific support needs.

Supporting Parents - Supporting Parenting

It is clear from the work that two distinct sets of issues arise in relation to supporting parents. Firstly, parents as individuals have their own social, personal, emotional and physical needs which may firstly need to be addressed before other issues are raised.

While many parents receive support from family and friends, other parents welcomed the support which a parents' group can provide. Being able to share concerns and engage in new activities while their children are being cared for, gives many parents the time and space to look at their own needs and helps to lessen feelings of isolation.

For some parents this process is an essential element in meeting their particular needs and once this has been addressed, feel better equipped to address their needs as parents and raise issues of concern. Parenting needs then tended to focus on increasing their knowledge about child development and health and diet related issues, as well as dealing more effectively with child behaviour at different developmental stages.

In terms of designing and delivering such support, parents welcome the opportunity to set their own agenda and would generally prefer a less formal type of delivery. Formal parenting skills type courses may suit some parents but others may

wish to access more general support, sometimes on an ad hoc basis.

On other occasions one to one support or specialist intervention may be required. Support for parents should therefore recognise that parents have a variety of needs at different stages in their children's lives and that personal individual circumstances can also affect the level of support required. Flexibility and adaptability in designing and delivering a range of support services is therefore essential and should, where possible, avoid a single focus approach.

The Way Ahead

The Positive Parenting Project is now well established and a number of parenting initiatives have been set up across the Project in response to the support needs which parents themselves have identified.

We shall continue to develop and expand this support and adapt to parents' needs as required. This report has identified a broad range of needs and support structures and how these can be met, which we will continue to explore with parents over the remainder of the Project.

During that time we shall work to identify the most effective ways of sustaining and adapting support, to ensure that parents' needs are being met and that support is sufficiently flexible to accommodate a wide variety of changing needs and parenting circumstances. Subsequent reports will focus on some of these support structures and how they have been developed these needs.

Developing support of this nature is essential if early preventive strategies are to successfully sustain and strengthen families and the relationship between parents and children.

As policy concerns about parenting continue to be raised, our work with parents will contribute to this complex and sensitive area in developing support structures which parents welcome, rather than support which parents decline.

"My life has been turned upside down since I had children."

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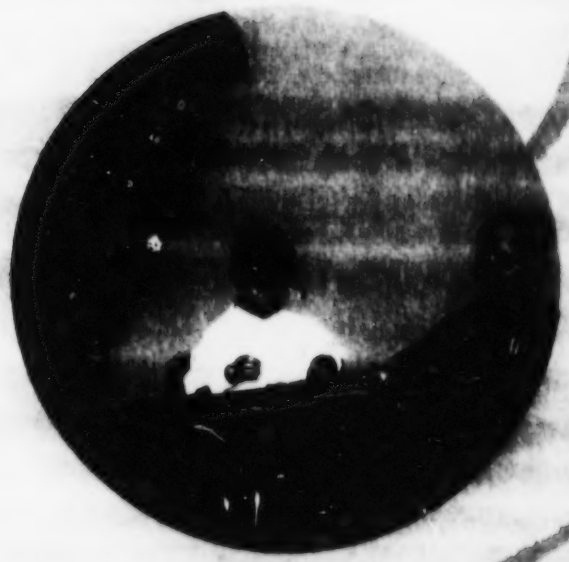

Parenting is now recognised as having a crucial impact on outcomes for children and young people and has become the focus of much public attention and concern. With a growing number of children living in poverty and major social and demographic changes affecting families, the importance of ensuring that parents have access to some form of support is crucial.

This report examines the support needs of over three hundred parents in four communities in Scotland and identifies some of the major issues to be considered in developing support structures to meet those needs. The first in a series of reports from the project, it will make valuable reading for policy makers, practitioners, those involved in the design and delivery of support services to parents and families and anyone with an interest in parenting issues.

Save the Children is the UK's leading international children's charity, working to create a better future for children. In a world where children are denied basic human rights, we champion the right of all children to a happy, healthy and secure childhood. We put the reality of children's lives at the heart of everything we do. Together with children, we are helping to build a better world for present and future generations.

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